THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Nazis, Fascists, and Oligarchs Must be Defeated

VVAW National Office

From the National Office

Well, here we are. The dystopia we warned against is forming before our very eyes. Even the most cynical amongst us is shocked.

There is a method to the seeming madness of destruction. The architects of this mayhem are making damn sure that the MAGA and DOGE operatives achieve their core goals of dismantling any means for challenges based on laws, constitutional or not. Yes, they—the 1%—intend to rule by executive (royal) order beyond the reach of any law.

Trump and Musk are the carnival barkers in this New Oligarchy, although they are dangerous as hell themselves. The dancing devils and evil clowns that seem to be the authors of this mayhem are aptly employed to distract attention from the real predators.

The 1% membership behind this coup was exposed in the "billionaires row" at the inauguration and in Trump's Cabinet appointments. The big-name billionaires at the inauguration hold a collective wealth of $1.35 trillion. Trump's Cabinet appointments of a succession of billionaires only belabor the point. This is an outright seizure of the US government by the wealthiest on the planet.

The goals seem to be the destruction of federal agencies and the people that enforce any protections based on safety, health and welfare, workers' rights, and equal opportunity, as well as the diversion of funding for these agencies. Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, the Veterans Administration, and the Post Office are just some areas being weakened in preparation for their looting via privatization. We could have expected legislators to stand up to these actions, but Congress is ceding its power. How long before DOGE determines these federal workers aren't needed?

Musk and DOGE are cutting thousands of jobs at the VA, illegally terminating probationary employees, many of whom are vets recently promoted. The atmosphere of terror is causing a heavy burden of stress on employees and patients alike. The firings and cuts have nothing to do with efficiency and better service to veterans. On the contrary, they are meant to divert VA funding into areas more lucrative for the 1% and to reduce the VA system to chaos—in preparation for a fire sale to the oligarchy. For more details on this con job and outright piracy, see other articles in this paper.

In addition, and not to be ignored, the military is being decimated. We are witnessing the disruption and destruction of the military command structure, weakening, confusing, and outright crippling it in preparation for its takeover and redeployment as a tool and profit center of the oligarchy, much as in Russia. This military neutering and chaos is also an outright gift to Putin, who can look forward to a much smoother conquest of Eastern Europe.

Trump aligning the US with Russia makes a kind of perverted sense. We've done our share of unprovoked invasions, taking other countries' resources and forcing regime changes. Trump just isn't making any attempts at disguising the greed behind the usual excuses of "saving" some part of the population or "defending" democracy.

When did the US attitude toward Nazis and fascists shift? Are people

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VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

VVAW

Many years ago, John Zutz of Milwaukee VVAW used the proceeds of his Milwaukee Beer Fest fundraisers to support the work of Chuck Theusch and the Library of Vietnam Project. This support led VVAW to help fund a computer lab at one of the children's libraries in My Lai, Vietnam in 2018. We never would've imagined that in 2025, we are about to begin construction on the **FOURTH** VVAW-sponsored Library and Learning Center in Vietnam. It appears there might even be the possibility of a **FIFTH** VVAW-sponsored library. We regard these projects as ongoing even after they are open to the students. Continuing support is required. The local people's committees and central government help fund the operations. Thanks to your generous support, we also provide for upgrades and other needs. What a journey this has been.

An Nghia courtyard. New library yellow building on right, in corner. January, 17, 2025.

Just recently, Chuck Theusch and Khoi Tran of the Vietnam Library Project spent almost two months visiting Vietnam and overseeing the construction of the Library and Learning Centers VVAW is sponsoring (along with all their other projects). They were joined on some of the library visits by Le Ly Hayslip, writer, memoirist, humanitarian, and author of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. They attended the December 15, 2024, dedication of the third Vietnam Veterans Against the War sponsored Library and Learning Center at the An Nghia Secondary School, An Nghia Village, Binh Dinh Province in Vietnam. Library of Vietnam Project members were also in attendance. The Library and computer lab are already in use.

They also attended the groundbreaking on January 17, 2025, of our **FOURTH** and largest Library and Learning Center in Vietnam. This Library and Learning center will be at the Hanh Minh Secondary School, Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province. This Library will serve secondary school students in grades 6-9. The goal for completion is by the fall of 2025.

Here are some updates on the Library and Learning Centers funded by VVAW, including messages directly from individuals in the specific library districts.

#1 From our first Library at the Pho Vinh Secondary School (grades 6-9), Duc Pho town, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

Letter from the Principal

We thank you and your sponsors for your interest in our school library activities in recent years. Since its inauguration, the Pho Vinh Secondary School library has become the focal point for the vibrant research and learning activities of the School's staff and students.

We have annually organized many meaningful activities at the Library every year, such as Book and Reading Culture Day, Book Sharing Club, exchanges with authors and works, reading culture ambassador movement, library reading periods and lessons, classroom bookshelf activities, and library connection activities, mobile book program and many other interesting activities.

Your library construction and

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More VVAW Library photos on page 8.

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VVAW Library and Learning Center Updates

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investment have brought positive values to our staff and students, significantly improving the School's educational quality and helping us complete one of the 28 criteria of the level 2 national standard school. In December 2024, the School was recognized by the Chairman of the Provincial People's Committee as a Level 2 National Standard School.

The school library has become a center for reading and cultural exchange of teachers and students from 4 secondary schools in Duc Pho town.

We appreciate you and the sponsors for giving us the opportunity and environment to access endless knowledge and colorful world cultures. You have brought us real happiness.

We hope the Library will be equipped with more audio-visual equipment so that the school library can become a learning and exchange center between students of our schools and other schools in our country.

We would like to work with you and the Library of Vietnam Project to operate and develop the Library effectively. We hope you send our thanks and best wishes to the sponsors.

Sincerely,
Suong Vo Thi Thanh
Principal

#2 From our second Library at the Hanh Trung Primary School (grades 1-5), Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam

Chuck Theusch reports "Ms. Tu, Headmaster of Hanh Trung, does an exemplary job with the VVAW Library. Getting books donated is a specialty. How does she do it? She invites other schools, agencies, and business people to visit her at the VVAW Library."

"They have been impressed with the Library. Indeed, one business person who routinely donates books to local schools was so moved by the quality of the VVAW facility AND the excellent management, books, and resources outreach program that he now makes his donation directly to this school rather than casting about the Province for other schools."

#3 From our third Library at the An Nghia Secondary School (grades 6-9), An Nghia Village, Binh Dinh Province in Vietnam.

Letter from the Librarian

The Headmasters are happy to have received the library, the first in our District, from the American Sponsor. The National Government has decreed that a separate library building is essential in improving our education.

The Library of Vietnam Project and its sponsors are the first of their kind to ever come to the Hoai An District with international support. This is fabulous! We hope to receive a Level 2 recognition from the Government Education Agency in 2025 because we have this important addition to our school.

We are a very poor district and do not have much money, agriculture being our business in this area. We have the Kim Son Prison, and that has been a historic thing people are aware of when they think of Hoai An District. This project will help us change how our local people and friends think of us. We now have some alumni from our poor district who will be stirring up support for others to donate more to this library. Thank You from our staff. We hope the sponsors in America will have additional support next year.

With the new library, we will be holding a special event called National Book Day on April 21, 2025, which was started by the National Government Decree in 2014. This is the 11th one we will join in. We will be a more important part of it in 2025.

Ms. Vo Thi Phan
Official librarian of the first library in the Hoai An District.
An Nghia Secondary School

#4 From our fourth Library at the Hanh Minh Secondary School, Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province.

This, our largest library and learning center to date, was made possible partly by a generous donation left to us in the will of a VVAW member, Charlie Jones. The plan is for the library to be completed and open for student use by September 15, 2025. A dedication will follow later in October or November.

Chuck Theusch reports "The staff has been particularly delighted with the VVAW Project. The People's Committee has added nearly $25,000 to make this library possible, largely thanks to the increased sponsorship that family, friends, and Charlie Jones of VVAW have seen fit to invest."

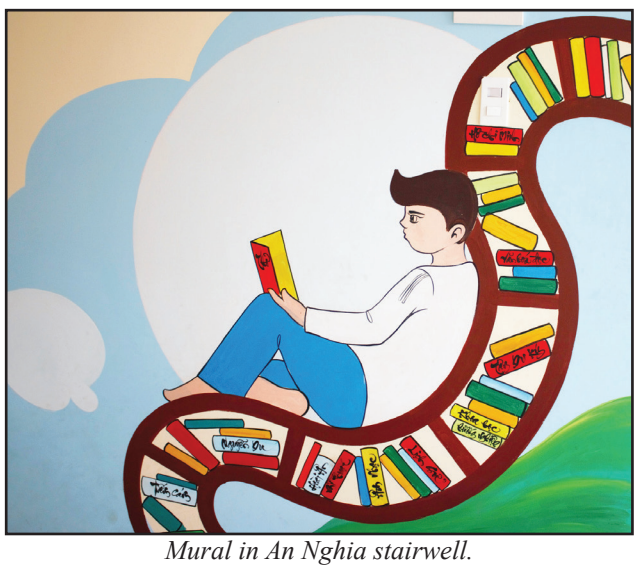
"Mr. Sam, Vice-Chairman of the District People's Committee, has been especially vocal in supporting the VVAW project. He has noted on different occasions that this library, with its larger size and expanded facilities, may serve as a prototype for other libraries across Quang Ngai Province."

VVAW's FIFTH library in Vietnam??

A long-time VVAW member has expressed interest in contributing significantly to constructing another VVAW-sponsored Library and Learning Center in Vietnam. We are working with Chuck and Khoi to determine possible locations and costs. We will need your help getting this project completed.

The role of education is key to our continuing to fund children's libraries and learning centers in Vietnam. The direct consequence is that children in poor and often still war-ravaged areas can access books and computer labs in dedicated spaces. Also, we hope that by supporting these projects, we draw attention to the damage our war in Vietnam wreaked upon the people and the land. Wars have consequences—long-lasting consequences.

We still need to raise funds to keep the library project going and continue supporting our existing libraries, so your support is essential. If you want to include VVAW in your will but don't know how, please contact the National Office at *vvaw@vvaw.org*. VVAW is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. You can also donate online at *www.vvaw.org* or mail us a check. All contributions are appreciated.



Mural in An Nghia stairwell.

Veteran Staff
Jeff Machota
Bill Branson
Joe Miller

Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons.Thanks to Chuck Theusch, Paul Goyette, Dave Kettenhofen, Claudia Krich, John Brennan, Ngan Nguyen, Kim Loftness, John Conroy, and others for contributing photos.

The Veteran is available online, article by article, or as a downloadable pdf at www.vvaw.org/veteran/

Thanks to those who have put VVAW in their wills. These gifts have have helped VVAW keep on keeping on and have contributed to the building of libraries in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will and don't know how, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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fooled when the Sieg Heiling goons try to deny their love of the Nazi past? When is it ever appropriate for a soon-to-be powerful government functionary to give a Nazi salute while lauding his master at an inauguration ball?

This election was not a sweeping victory. To quote Gil Scott-Heron about the Reagan election, "Mandate, my ass!" Trump won by less than 1.5% of those voting, around 2.2 million votes. The slim margin of victory still shows the vast number of eligible voters in our country who are disenfranchised and alienated from the political process. 36% of the US voting population did not vote. That's close to 90 million who sat out the election.

The current administration is the most right-wing in our memory and possibly the most right-wing in the history of the country. But we can't call Trump's Executive Orders and the actions of Musk and DOGE "conservative." Where exactly are the "good government" conservatives?

We must remember that this administration is a mess. With fanatics and billionaires in charge, the Trump administration is sowing destruction. Their incompetence could also lead to its eventual downfall. With each blunder, Trump's poll numbers plummet. It won't take long for those non-billionaires who voted for him to realize that his actions are not in their interest.

The looming question is whether these polls or elections will be relevant. Why would this crew of thieves, con artists, and fanatics chance another election when they are already ruling by executive order?

What Trump and his cronies really want is to morph the US into profitable fiefdoms run by a gang of oligarchs, with the most rabid dogs as leaders. Hopefully, soon, many will realize that Trump and crew have just used hate and xenophobia to cover for their looting of the country for their own and global capital's benefit.

Trump has doubled down on his Orwellian statements. Appointing Musk to lead a non-governmental department (DOGE), denying he's in charge but still backing all the tactics he uses. Spreading lies like Russia didn't start the war, insisting it was Ukraine's fault for trying to manage its own affairs. The insulting of Volodymyr Zelenskyy like a schoolyard bully. Also, spewing the BS that Palestinians will benefit from the US remaking their land into a Western-style resort. Urban renewal always benefits the poor and powerless, don't you know?

We hoped our waning years could be spent securing our legacy for future generations. Instead, we get a fresh shit sandwich every day. Oftentimes, more than one. This is not the revolution many of us imagined and hoped for many years ago. The destruction of our government is appalling. The transformation into an oligarchy is happening before our very eyes. The rampant destruction of our current government structure, with a madman-led oligarchy emerging from the ruins, is almost beyond belief.

Many of our parents and relations fought against Nazis and fascists in their attempts at European domination decades ago. We followed suit, fighting the junior Nazis of the 1970s and 1980s who attempted to sow hate on the streets of the US. Now we find Nazis and their enablers in the highest offices and cabinet positions in the US government. They intend to dismantle all the progress many of us and previous generations fought for. No matter how imperfect, many of these programs were put in place by the struggles of the people demanding better of their government. We expected big government to be there for us as we were for it. By leaving power up to individual states and municipalities, Trump's Project 2025 dream team is making it more difficult for people to direct their demands to institutions that affect all. They dilute our power by making us fight on multiple fronts. The only winners in all of this are the lawyers and the Rich.

How did we get here? Those who voted for the lies of the Republican party were primarily responsible. Everyone should have known better with the failure of Trump's first term in office and his increasingly unhinged behavior during the 2024 election. The Democrats covering up Biden's decline and not forcing him to step aside sooner was also a huge factor. Now, they are trying to place the blame on the Progressive left. The Democrats marginalized progressive and radical change and slavishly let their rich masters move the center further and further to the right.

We have not even begun to see how damaging the crippling of our government will be. We are probably witnessing an exponential cascade of transgenerational damage. The outlawing of protest, especially those who speak out for Palestinian justice, is chilling and aimed at crushing future youth resistance. We must remind ourselves that the ruling class has never been shy about using force against resistance—now they have little to fear from the law or the "opposition" party.

What can we do? Arm ourselves with knowledge, and don't be swayed by the algorithms of the rightward-enabling/moving tech companies. Share information. Share our experiences with relatives, friends, and acquaintances who have drunk the Kool-Aid. Organize at all levels to survive and fight against these oppressive forces. Organize information exchanges. Organize trees—phone/text trees to spread warnings and information. Utilize every avenue we have.

We must encourage the Democrats to resist compromise and cease bootlicking the right. The Republicans thwarted the Dems for years when they were in the minority. Do not let the Dems be accommodationists. Pressure them to be the resistance. Support those progressive Dems fighting to take power from the Dem old guard, who are busy placating the fascist regime. Call. Write. E-mail, including writing and/or calling elected officials, even Trump! Join protests if you are able. Support organizations resisting and helping those being hit the hardest. Every dollar or volunteer hour does count.

Many unions are leading the protests against VA cuts. We can support them, spread the word, and, if possible, attend the rallies.

Organizing and resistance do pay off. During a recent interview, Donald Trump's "border czar," Tom Homan, made a big admission. He complained that the residents of Chicago were making it too hard for ICE to enact Trump's mass deportation plans. "Chicago, very well educated," Homan whined. "They've been educated how to defy ICE, on how to hide from ICE. They call it 'Know Your Rights.' I call it how to escape from ICE."

Will this be enough? Maybe. But inaction will certainly lead to defeat. This battle won't be won until power truly rests with the people. We must ensure the lessons of our struggle and legacy survive to guide future generations.

Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

The year was 1968. Much was happening here and around the world: assassinations, Civil Rights struggles, and war. It was significant in my life also. I got drafted. I went off to Basic and AIT and then back to Chicago on leave that year. This was shortly before the Nixon—Humphrey presidential election and politics were hot and heavy. When on leave, I made a date with Sharon. We talked a lot of politics. Her take on Nixon was that he was a fascist. She seemed sincere when telling me she was considering moving to Canada if Nixon won. So I went back to Fort Leonard Wood. Nixon won. I returned home for leave. Sharon couldn't be found. Do you think?

Then there was Mitchell. The war was still on. For me, it was now over. I used the GI Bill to take a few courses at Roosevelt University. I took one class from a dude by the name of Mitchell. Mitchell had a bag full of conspiracy theories, which were mostly what was talked about in class. I enjoyed it. I like conspiracy theories. Maybe I shouldn't say that in the age of QANON, where the fascists find recruits, but I do. As for Mitchell, he told us students that he had a go-bag ready, a passport, and an open airline ticket at a place that was easily accessible. Just in case.

I mention Sharon and Mitchell because much of that thought has come back today, brought about by Trump and the MAGA clones. Back then, it was Nixon. Today, it's worse. Nixon famously said, "I am not a crook." Trump doesn't care that he's convicted. His followers don't care. That makes him much more dangerous to us, the American people. That's why it's not unlikely that his policies and executive orders often come up for discussion when you talk with friends and acquaintances. Admittedly, some actually like him, which is something to be aware of. Most have thoughts of hunkering down or musing about moving to Canada. Fine thoughts. But be aware that Trumpism is fascism. Fascism will creep into the picture. If we don't stand against it, it will not stop. That's where the country is heading. The indicators are present. They are transferring massive wealth from the poor and middle class to the rich. Civil Rights gains are under threat. The use of violence by the state will be the first resort, not the last.

A thought. The Trumpees are down at the Mexican border trying to prevent immigrants from coming over. Then maybe the Canadians will try to prevent Americans from crossing over. Then, if they keep going, all will end in the Faroe Islands.

As the poet Gil Scott-Heron said,

And now it's winter
It's winter in America
Yes, and all of the healers have been killed
Or sent away, yeah
But the people know, the people know
It's winter
Winter in America
And ain't nobody knows what to save
Save your soul, Lord knows
From winter in America

Trump has come to power a second time with a mandate to do harm. The votes of the Republican base combined with those dissatisfied with the way things have gone have resulted in this rise of fascism by whatever name you might call it. Throughout history, fascist leaders and fascist governments have relied on their opposition to let things slide. That enables fascists. I don't know if these American fascists can consolidate power or not. At the very least, they'll come close. In response, I don't think we should be running off to Canada, either actually or in our minds. We need a direct approach.

Many of you may remember a film in the early seventies. *Only the Beginning*. It was about Vietnam, anti-war veterans, and VVAW. The last scene in the film shows scenes of veterans protesting the Vietnam War by throwing their medals away on the steps of the nation's capital in 1971. The medals were thrown over a security barrier, and each veteran said a few words. *Only the Beginning* captured some of this on film. The last brother in the film was shown throwing away his medals and saying something like this. (I paraphrase) I don't ever want to fight again, but if I do, it will be to take these steps. Words to contemplate.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author, and long-time VVAW member.

Trump Cuts Aid to Vietnam, then Restores - Some!

Nadya Williams

After the Trump regime's slashing in early February of 90% of funds for USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), Vietnam saw an abrupt halt to past assistance in such areas as health care, the environment, climate change, disaster relief, and war aftermath alleviation, according to a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pham Thu Hang. Most importantly, the war legacies alleviation included life-saving bomb and mine clearance, plus dioxin remediation—particularly at heavily-contaminated former US bases and airfields in Da Nang and Bien Hoa (outside Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City).

Just as abruptly, AID money was reinstated in late February, but only for explosives clearance and at nine projects in seven countries: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq, Peru, Ukraine, and Palau.

Veterans For Peace Chapter 160, the Hoa Binh (Peace) chapter in Vietnam, was especially impacted. USAID funds were channeled from the US State Department through the Norwegian government's humanitarian organization NPA—Norwegian People's Aid, specifically for UXO clearance. An indirect recipient was Project RENEW (Restoring the Environment and Neutralizing the Effects of the War), co-founded in 2001 by a Quang Tri Province official and American veteran Chuck Searcy, president of VFP 160, who lives full-time in Ha Noi. Quang Tri Province, hard up against the 17th parallel DMZ, is the most heavily bombed area of Vietnam. RENEW also funds wheelchairs and prosthetics for victims of unexploded ordnance, as well as Agent Orange/Dioxin sufferers.

"Efforts are now being made to temporarily resume our mine clearance and other explosive ordnance and munitions handling and destruction activities on the US-funded projects in these seven countries," Norwegian People's Aid states. "NPA still does not know what the final outcome of the ongoing evaluation of the United States will be."

Mr. Hien Xuan Ngo, Communications & Development Manager for Project RENEW, stated after the initial halt, "The recent suspension of USAID and Department of State-funded programs globally makes support for vital initiatives like Project RENEW's Mine Risk Education and Victim Assistance program even more crucial. This support is essential for ensuring the safety of adults and children and promoting the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Here, in the photo, Ho Van Lai, who tragically lost three limbs and an eye in a cluster bomb accident at just ten years old, educates local school children about UXO safety as part of Project RENEW's Mine Risk Education program, funded by the Irish Government."

Norwegian People's Aid had previously announced the dismissal of up to 1,700 employees due to the uncertainty surrounding future support for US-funded projects. NPA "is pleased that there has been a temporary exemption from the freeze for nine projects, but does not yet have complete clarity on how our staffing will be affected by the limited exemption from the funding freeze."

Nadya Williams is a member of the board of VFP Chapter 160 in Vietnam.

Ho Van Lai, UXO Victim, warning children at the Mine Risk Education program of Project RENEW.

Saving the VA: A Social Worker's Perspective

Aimee Potter

10,000+ Federal Employees FIRED
ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS
I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.
-MLK
Stop the War on America's Workforce
STOP FIRING VETS
THE TIME IS NOW
Government Workers Work for America!

Aimee Potter speaking at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Chicago, February 26, 2025.

I am a social worker at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and a steward with AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees). I have had the privilege of working with veterans from all walks of life. Each day, I witness firsthand the VA's essential role in providing critical services to those who have served our country. From healthcare to housing assistance and mental health support to substance use recovery and treatment, the VA is a lifeline for millions of veterans who rely on its comprehensive care.

However, in recent years, challenges have threatened the VA's ability to fulfill its mission. Staffing shortages, increased demand for services, and evolving needs among veterans require ongoing commitment and adaptation. As someone who serves on the front lines, I see the impact of these challenges—not just in statistics or reports but in the lives of the veterans who depend on us.

One of the most pressing concerns is maintaining and strengthening the VA's ability to provide timely and high-quality care. Many veterans experience complex mental health needs, including PTSD, depression, and substance use disorders. The VA's integrated care model allows for a holistic approach, ensuring veterans receive both medical and psychosocial support. As social workers, we are an essential part of this system, helping veterans navigate these challenges by connecting them to the appropriate services and resources.

It is crucial that we continue to advocate for policies that support a strong VA system. Ensuring adequate funding, improving recruitment and retention of skilled professionals, and expanding access to services are necessary to uphold the VA's mission. Supporting the VA is not a partisan issue but a commitment to those who have sacrificed for our nation.

The path forward requires collaboration, innovation, and dedication. By prioritizing the well-being of veterans, we uphold the values of honor, service, and duty that they have embodied throughout their lives. As a social worker, I remain committed to advocating for a robust and effective VA—one that continues to serve those who have served us.

Now more than ever, we must come together to ensure the VA remains a cornerstone of support for veterans. Their needs are evolving, and we must evolve with them, ensuring that no veteran is left without the care and resources they deserve.

How can we be led by someone who calls themselves a leader and allows thousands of combat veterans to fall by the wayside and terminate their lifeline of employment? Doug Collins, VA Secretary, says he is looking at a reduction of force to help fulfill the core mission of the VA. How is this consistent with the VA's mission to serve our nation's heroes?

The VA secretary has stated that we aren't working efficiently. The Biden Administration increased our hiring of additional social workers, psychologists, and many other VA positions throughout this country to meet the needs of veterans and their families. We remain at a deficit, and this Administration's recommendation to cut additional positions on the backs of veterans and their families is simply unethical and cruel.

Following what the President has called for has proven to be messy, to say the least. This has been demonstrated throughout this Administration by the firing of thousands of Federal employees, creating total chaos among multiple departments and services. To support an additional cut in VA healthcare is criminal. The reason why we still have a backlog for Veteran services and benefits is the opposite of what this Administration is claiming.

We need more staff to fulfill this mission, not less. Our caseloads are high, and we have the most committed workforce, as evidenced by our multiple surveys of veterans and their families. How about considering the many lives saved by the committed workforce instead of firing them? According to the 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, "On average in 2021 and 2022, veterans receiving Veterans Health Administration (VHA) care were less likely to die by suicide than veterans outside of VHA care and the data also showed long-term reductions in suicide for veterans with VHA mental health diagnoses as well as decreases among additional subgroups of veterans in VHA care."

"Underscoring the importance of timely and responsive access to crisis care supports, data also showed decreased suicide outcomes for veterans in VHA care with Veterans Crisis Line contacts: The suicide rate in the first month following documented Veterans Crisis Line contact in 2021 was 22.5% lower than in 2019."

So why are we firing crisis line workers and saying they have no public-facing role in providing essential care for veterans and their families?

Veterans make up more than 30% of this workforce, so to stigmatize and blame the employees for the mishaps of this system is simply ridiculous.

This Administration continues to use the word efficiency. Secretary Collins claims employees don't do their jobs. He also claims he is protecting over 300,000 positions at the Veterans Administration. In fact, he is not protecting positions at all, as he supports the firing of mission-critical, front-facing positions, each of which impacts the way care is provided or whether care is provided at all.

This Administration has fired a slew of veterans/employees working with homeless veterans, as well as outreach teams working in the community. Part of the VA's mission has been to increase community connections and build collaborative engagement among the VA and outside resources. The VA has done a good job of expanding these relationships.

How is the best use of our money increasing the amount of money the government provides to the Department of Defense and stealing from the veterans who have protected this country for years? They have lost limbs and family members, and many don't sleep at night due to the trauma of war. So now, we punish them further and remove the vital services they are accessing by firing the very staff committed to serving them.

Over the past month, the VA has cut 2,400 positions, and VA Secretary Doug Collins said this week the department plans to slash more than 70,000 jobs, with these numbers as high as 84,000. The goal would reduce VA staffing to 2019 levels, three years before the historic PACT Act expanded benefits to more than a million veterans sickened by exposures to toxins.

Thousands of veterans have been fired and handed a blanket termination email for poor performance, including veterans who have received awards for their performance. When Secretary Collins was questioned about the indiscriminate treatment related to the terminations of thousands of veteran employees, he stated, "These were probationary employees." That doesn't matter. We all were once probationary employees, and we passed probation because of our work ethic and commitment to veterans. One current veteran employee stated, "At least in combat, I knew my mission. I was supported in it by my teammates by my leadership, and I had agency. I had a weapon. I could fight against a tangible enemy; now it's just an invisible cloud of dread."

Comparing the VA to the private sector is a bad argument. You are robbing veterans of the care that you promised them when they fought for this country.

This Secretary has no empathy or care for veterans. He went on national TV to say that veterans employed by the government have no employment preference in the Federal or private sector. This is not true. According to OPM (Office of Personnel Management):

"Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in appointments to Federal jobs. Recognizing their sacrifice, Congress enacted laws to prevent veterans seeking Federal employment from being penalized for their time in military service. Veterans' preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served their country in uniform, restores veterans to a favorable competitive position for Government employment, and acknowledges the larger obligation owed to disabled veterans.

Veterans' preference in its present form comes from the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, as amended, and is now codified in various provisions of Title 5, United States Code. By law, veterans who are disabled or served on active duty in the Armed Forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over others in hiring from competitive lists of eligibles and in retention during reductions in force."

According to Secretary Collins, there is no Veterans Preference, and this Administration clearly does not follow their laws or obligations, as they continue to fire veterans without any regard for the time they served.

The mass firing of VA employees is a death sentence for countless veterans who rely on the VA for lifesaving care. Abandoning veterans during a critical time of accessing medical and mental health care is unnecessary suffering, and veterans will die.

When veterans die, the blood of their lives will be on the shoulders of this Administration.

Barry Romo at a Save the VA demo, May 18, 2018, Chicago.

Aimee Potter is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and AFGE steward.

We Must All Speak Up Before VA Health Care Is Gutted

John Ketwig

If you are a veteran who gets health care from the VA (the Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs), you should become aware of the threat to that care. Elon Musk's DOGE has already fired 2,400 VA employees, and a Reduction in Force (RIF) order was issued on February 26th. The Trump administration's goal is to reduce VA employees by 80,000! The VA has long been critically understaffed.

Perhaps you've noticed the staff shortage while interacting with VA health facilities. The problem became far more acute with the passage of the PACT Act, which recognized the effects of burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxins. Long overdue, the PACT Act seemed to be a potential lifesaver, immediately adding more than 800,000 new veterans to the VA's workload. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the branch of the VA responsible for veterans' health care.

The VA contributes enormously to our nation's medical research, but those research programs have been handicapped by staff losses, hiring freezes, and funding cuts. Research projects affecting cancer, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease), and multiple sclerosis have been forced to stop operations!

Meanwhile, powerful MAGA forces in Congress have already unveiled a plan to destroy the VA's ability to deliver health care to you! Packaged in a tidy wrapper and titled the "Veterans ACCESS Act," this legislation is designed to be misconstrued as a measure to provide better "access" to health care for veterans. Originally, The CHOICE Act and the follow-up MISSION ACT were created to help veterans who live at unrealistic distances from a VHA hospital or CBOC (Community Based Outpatient Clinic). Also, with the shortages of professional personnel or equipment, some VA facilities cannot provide some categories of health care. A few years ago, the VA had approximately 67,000 openings for doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, and psychologists. Increased hiring in 2024 due to the PACT Act has decreased that number. Firing 80,000 will affect VA healthcare, like a heart attack.

Hey, if you need care and there's no one to provide it at your local VA hospital or CBOC, it seems like a kindness that Congress has provided a plan that will allow you to be cared for in the "private sector" or for-profit health care system. Attempts to address those situations began with the CHOICE Act of 2014 and the first Trump Administration's MISSION Act of 2017. As he signed the MISSION Act into law, President Trump declared, "All during the campaign, I'd say, 'Why can't they just go out and see a doctor instead of standing in line?'" Senator Bernie Sanders predicted, "My fear is that this bill will open the door to the draining, year after year, of much-needed resources from the VA." Currently, the administration of the MISSION Act has been sublet out to a corporation called Community Care. Very few VA vets have not heard of Community Care. It has been a blessing for some, but there is a catch.

For years, the for-profit medical industry has longed to get its hands on the VA's multi-billion dollar budget ($369.6 billion in 2025). Those previous programs, especially the proposed "Veterans ACCESS Act," pay the "civilian" healthcare facilities with funds from the VA's budget! Hidden in the depths of the "Veterans ACCESS Act" like a ticking time bomb is a provision intended to dismantle the integrated VA healthcare system faster than you can say "privatization." Under this proposed act, first of all, veterans seeking care for addiction or mental health challenges would be able to walk into virtually any provider and request outpatient treatment without any VA authorization, referral, or approval. The provider would then bill the VA and be paid… No questions asked! Currently, private providers are required to keep a full staff of administrative help to coordinate and negotiate claims with insurance companies, get prior approval, and then word the actual claim so that it might be paid in full or in part. Again, under the proposed ACCESS Act, the VA would simply pay the bills, no questions asked. To make matters worse, there would be no requirement whatsoever that the private provider meet VA standards of care, training, equipment, or treatments.

That's phase one.

Then, after three years, this arrangement is intended to encompass ALL VA medical care, fundamentally transforming the VA's primary role from a healthcare provider to an insurance company that writes checks. Again, a key provision of the ACCESS Act is that the provider will not be required to meet VA equipment, training, or care standards. Perhaps you have seen how efficient that business model has been for the for-profit medical community. Recently, the murder of a for-profit insurance company CEO earned a shocking chorus of praise and support for the murderer, reflecting the American public's widespread dissatisfaction with the for-profit medical industry.

The ACCESS ACT would not allow the VA to count a telehealth visit as meeting Community Care Program standards. Still, private sector providers can schedule telehealth visits, increasing the number of CCP referrals to Community Care provider facilities. Also, veterans would NOT be restricted to VA or Community Care providers. There would be no financial penalties for "going out of network." Again, the hidden purpose of this plan is to devour the VA's healthcare budget and ultimately drive the VA system out of existence.

Will referral of VA healthcare to the private sector actually result in shorter appointment times or any improvement in the care provided? According to one government study, 77 percent of all US counties face a severe shortage of practicing psychiatrists, psychologists, or social workers! Fifty-five percent, all of them rural counties, have no mental health professionals at all. Even when private-sector psychiatrists are available, many are unwilling to accept private insurance or federal reimbursement. Under such "market conditions," not only do patients wait too long for appointments, but according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 40 percent of Americans with schizophrenia and 51 percent suffering from bipolar disorder go untreated in any given year. By contrast, data available on Capitol Hill in May 2018 showed that the waiting time to see a VHA mental health professional averaged four days! One in five VHA patients was seen the same day they made an appointment. Even though roughly 16 percent of VHA primary care facilities were then operating at over 100 percent of capacity, for the system as a whole, the average wait time to see a VHA primary care doctor was five days, and nine days for specialist appointments.

The CHOICE Act revealed severe problems with wait times that reflected the problems described above. Hence, the MISSION Act established looser standards for outside referrals regarding acceptable wait times, mileage from the nearest VA facility, or both. Private for-profit providers became affiliates under the umbrella of a reorganized and expanded Community Care Network, administered by another third-party for-profit company we vets know as Community Care. Private-sector providers are not obligated to demonstrate that their wait times are comparable or better than the VA's, and the medical professionals are not required to meet the quality standards required of VA personnel.

As the VA's budget is siphoned off through Community Care's hands, other private-sector providers rush in like pigs to the trough to get on the Community Care list. This plan is designed to suck so much money out of the VA that in a short time, the VA will have to close its hospitals and CBOCs, turning all of your care over to the "private sector" or for-profit industry. If you heard about the Project 2025 plan presented to the incoming second Trump wrecking crew before last year's election, this entire plan (or conspiracy?) is outlined in horrific detail. Perhaps you've also heard that your VA facilities won't be affected. That's a lie! Lies from politicians when billions of dollars are at stake? Hey, the biggest proponents of these plans, from the very start, were the infamous Koch brothers. Brother David died, but brother Charles has spent millions privatizing the VA. His bank account funds the anti-VA Concerned Veterans for America lobbying organization, which poses as a Veterans Service Organization (VSO).

Follow the money, which will hemorrhage from the VA to the private sector. The likely outcome is that the VA will close its inpatient services and its hospitals and become a sprawling assortment of outpatient clinics (CBOCs), not unlike "urgent care" facilities. That is exactly the plan laid out in the Project 2025 playbook. Veterans are being assured that the VA facilities they rely on won't be impacted. Don't buy it for a second.

Do you think this forecast is an exaggeration? Think again. Independent healthcare experts warned last year that the survival of the VA system is in peril if runaway Community Care spending, which has been growing 15-20% annually, doesn't slow way down. The ACCESS bill puts the pedal to the metal.

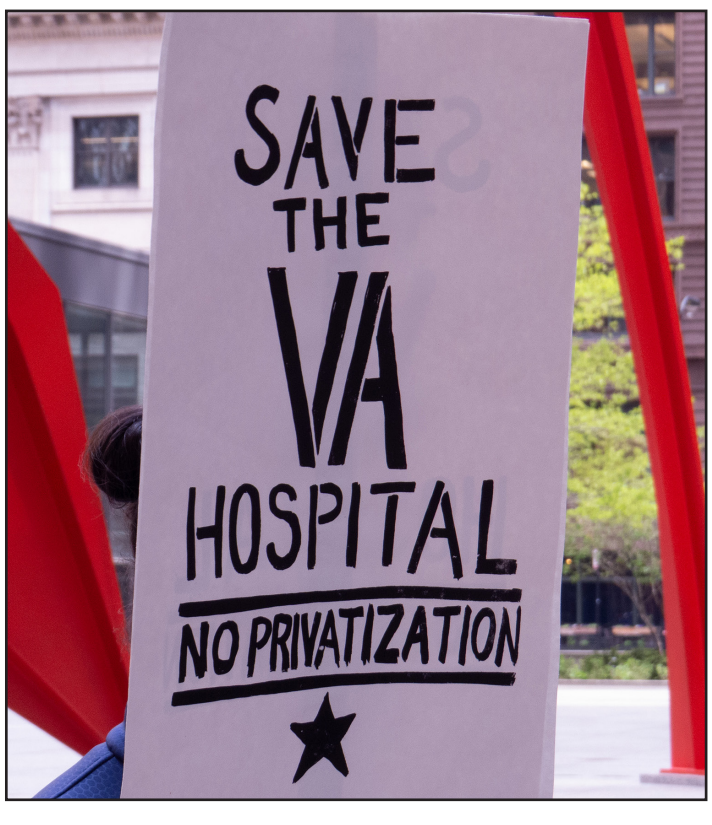
Suppose the VA turns into an insurance agency and cuts direct care. In that case, veterans will be cast out to locations where there are long-standing shortages in primary, mental health, inpatient, and emergency care providers. Nearly 200 rural hospitals have shuttered, and over 700 more—one-third of all rural hospitals in the country—are on the brink of collapse. In this healthcare desert, who exactly will treat our veterans? The ACCESS Act does not include any recognition that the VA desperately needs to expand, not shrink, its workforce. Without a substantial addition of health care personnel, the VA will need to cut back services that veterans depend on.

It is clear that this legislation is a thinly veiled attempt to divert public funds to the private sector under the guise of veterans' choice. Survey data shows that over 90 percent of veterans enrolled in VHA prefer to receive their care from it. Studies show that VA care is equal to or better than private-sector care, without even considering that the VA is the only entity suited to treat medical and psychological issues specific to military service. If the above provisions of this legislation are enacted, veterans will soon be unable to choose VHA.

While the VA is far from perfect, today, eligible veterans in America are getting proven better care at lower costs than patients served by the for-profit medical industry. Today, our national debt is more than 37 trillion dollars! (Just six years ago, it was 21 trillion.) Congress is in no mood to increase the VA's budget, so reducing who is eligible for care will soon become necessary. Once again, that is exactly the strategy laid out in the Project 2025 playbook. Eliminate eligible veterans and curtail the health care for which they are eligible. Again, DOGE has already cut VA staffing, and the second Trump Administration has only been in place less than two months! While some veterans appreciate the convenience of being referred to Community Care close to home, that is nowhere near the planned ultimate goal. The ACCESS Act is frightening, and it's just the start. At this time, it is just a Bill, a proposal. It is absolutely vital that it be defeated! Every veteran across America must contact their Congressperson and Senators about this travesty. If we don't act fast, we will lose the VA healthcare system we know and depend on.

Call the US Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and they will tell you the phone number of your Senators or Congressperson.

In closing, I must admit that most of this material came from VA data available on the internet, from an article on *Military.com* by Russell B. Lemle, published February 21st, 2025, and from two books and numerous articles by the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute (VHPI), *Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans* by Suzanne Gordon, and *Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends, and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs* by Suzanne Gordon, Steve Early, and Jasper Craven, Duke University Press, 2022.



John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW and the author of …and a hard rain fell, A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam, and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter. He is hoping to find a publisher for his first novel.

Letter to the Editor

John Lindquist

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a disabled Vietnam Veteran Marine currently living in England. I was lucky enough to marry a lovely English woman.

President Trump and Elon Musk have started to cut healthcare staff at the Veterans Administration Hospital system. So far, 2,080 have been cut, and many are military veterans.

I have been a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War since 1970. We fought to end that war and for decent benefits for all veterans. It took us ten years to get Veterans Centers and treatment and compensation for PTSD. We fought for twenty-three years to get testing, treatment, and compensation for Agent Orange poisoning. We will have to fight again to beat these cuts.

The President evaded Vietnam and Cold War service with seven deferments for heel spurs, which his Dad paid for!

President Trump has also gotten into bed with Putin. He said the Ukrainians started the war. It was Putin and the Russian Army who invaded in 2014 and 2022. The Russian Empire and the USSR occupied Ukraine for 250 years. Russia signed the 1991 Minsk Treaty to recognize Ukraine's sovereignty and borders if they gave up the nukes in the country. President Trump is willing to sell out the people of Ukraine and turn his back on Europe. Ronald Reagan is rolling over in his grave!

We will stop these cuts to Veterans Health Care and will support the Ukrainian people in their war against the invaders. President Trump's actions are un-American.

Semper fidelis.

John A. Lindquist

USMC 1967–1969, Radio Operator, 3rd Marine Division.

John Lindquist, Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, England. March 8, 2025.

SPAR
market
NEW
IGNITE YOUR TASTE BUDS
WIN £10,000 CASH
STOP CUTS AT THE VETERANS HOSPITAL
DON'T PRIVATIZE VETERANS HEALTH CARE
DO NOT GET IN BED WITH PUTIN PRESIDENT TRUMP!
STAND WITH THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE

John Lindquist, Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, England. March 8, 2025.

STOP CUTS AT THE VETERANS HOSPITAL
DON'T PRIVATIZE VETERANS HEALTH CARE
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STAND WITH THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE

Des Barkus, British Merchant Marine delivered fuel to Vietnam 1968 to 1970. Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, England. March 8, 2025.

Neville Chamberlain Republicans

Mike Woloshin

Driven by a purported ambition to mediate an end to a war of aggression, as Teddy Roosevelt did in mediating the Russo-Japanese War, which merited Roosevelt the 1905 Nobel Peace Prize, Donald Trump did not follow the dictates of the ghost-written *The Art of the Deal*. As Vice President J.D. Vance addressed the February 2025 "Munich Security Conference," he appeared ignorant of the 1938 "Munich Agreement" in which British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain agreed to cede the German-Speaking Czech Sudetenland to the Third Reich in which Czech President Edward Benes had virtually no voice.

If that scenario seems familiar, it was recently repeated in the White House humiliation of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, who, like Edward Benes, had no voice in the matter. Days later, under immense pressure, Zelenskyy agreed to cede rare earth mineral rights to the US, cede the Russian-speaking provinces of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, and agree to a 30-day cease-fire, which Vladimir Putin has yet to accept. Within a year of the 1938 "Munich Agreement," the Third Reich had swallowed up the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Yet, there is no indication that Putin would act any differently, still refusing to recognize the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or independence of Ukraine, as previously recognized by the US, UK, and Russian Federation under the 1994 "Budapest Memorandum," in which Ukraine surrendered its nuclear arsenal.

Such duplicity is similar to John Foster Dulles canceling the 1956 Vietnamese reunification election provided for under the 1954 Geneva Agreement. President Eisenhower wrote in his diary following the Vietnamese defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, "I am convinced that no military victory is possible in that kind of theater," recognizing that victory was impossible against a determined independence movement. As Ho Chi Minh wrote previously, "Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty." Like the Vietnamese, the Ukrainians will have the tenacity and determination to win their national independence from the hated Russian Empire!

Slava Ukraini - Glory to Ukraine!

Mike Woloshin, AMH-2, USN, ATKRON 86, onbd USS Coral Sea (CVA-43), Vietnam (Yankee Station) 1969-1970. Mike is the grandson of Ukrainian immigrants, a retired Assistant Cook County Public Defender, and active in VVAW since joining in 1971.

For Pointman: Faint Praise For A Nation's Plebiscite

Here it's been two weeks since JabbaTrump won it all
and I wake and sit up from a dream, cross-eyed
I was out mixing potting soil
among specimen Dragon Trees
And up walks Jeff Machota and Bill Branson
who I'd not ever met before
Come to give me a map
of my home town way down the coast
Unfolded it they did
right on the potting table, 3/4 " ply
Beautiful cartography, every building crisply shown
Plus the river on the north side of town
Where Pointman Scheppers and I rafted west
before I was flown off for Cam Rahn Bay
Such an array of topo lines
eliciting hills, peaks and ridges, around Sunland
Low and high terrain we'd known long before
He'd not admire films Apocalypse or Deer Hunter
In his own film, DeNiro climbed back up his ridge all alone
aimed, then let that animal go free
Pointman said those flicks weren't real enough
from coast to coast, life is now way too real
What was a miasma, has become
a phantasmagoria of hate
But he was as genuine however
as the granite on El Capitan

—*John Crandell*

VVAW Library Project Updates

An Nghia dedication ceremony with staff, December 16, 2024.

An Nghia teachers by one of the murals inside the library, December 16, 2024.

Le Ly Hayslip, by one of the An Nghia murals inside the library, January 17, 2025.

Groundbreaking, Hanh Minh, Nghia Hanh District, January 17, 2025.

Plans for the Hanh Minh Library and Learning Center to be completed by September, 2025.

THE VETERAN
SECTION B
Volume 55, Number 1 Spring 2025

"We've Been Betrayed!"

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon

Who's Fighting Back (and not) Against Trump's Cuts in VA Jobs and Services

Among the Republican voters experiencing buyer's remorse are more than a few military veterans who chose Trump over Harris by a margin of 65 to 34%, according to some exit polls.

Their shock and dismay surfaced in DC this month during the legislative conference of the reliably conservative and hawkish Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), which has 1.4 million members.

In the run-up to that annual event, VFW national commander Al Lipphardt urged his members to "march forth" and "engage with lawmakers" to "stop the bleeding" at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Thanks to Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the VA now faces disruption of its benefit claims handling, healthcare delivery, data security, critical medical research, and stable employment for 100,000 former service members.

The VFW's resulting Capitol Hill visit on March 4 was not exactly the second coming of the militant march on Washington in 1932 by 30,000 jobless World War I vets. During that confrontation, leaders of the VFW and American Legion provided political cover for Herbert Hoover, the conservative Republican president who ignored veteran unemployment (and, like Trump, championed small government).

But the VFW's condemnation of Trump's mass firing of vets is definitely a break with more recent Veteran Service Organization (VSO) subservience to the White House. Iraq war vet and VFW life member Kris Goldsmith calls it "historic" and "nothing short of extraordinary."

Bleeding Gets Worse, Not Better

Nevertheless, as Goldsmith argues, it will take a lot more than issuing press statements, presenting hearing testimony, and politely lobbying legislators to stop the further "bleeding" that will result from a VA "reorganization" first reported on March 5.

According to an internal memo, Trump's new VA Secretary, Doug Collins, intends to cut 80,000 more jobs—contrary to his confirmation hearing testimony before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) on January 21.

On that occasion, the ex-Congressman from Georgia assured his former Capitol Hill colleagues, "we're not going to sacrifice veterans' benefits to do a budget." This helped the right-wing Air Force Reserve chaplain get confirmed, with virtually no SVAC opposition, and by a 77 to 23 Senate vote in his favor.

Despite the leaked document from VA headquarters, President Trump insists that he will still "take good care of our veterans" and wants to keep the total number losing their federal jobs "as small as possible." Meanwhile, he boasted of "having great success at slimming down our government," which was a major focus of his State of the Union address.

During that 100-minute rant and ramble, Trump didn't mention veterans or Collins even once, despite his various shout-outs to cops, firefighters, border patrol officers, and other cabinet members.

As part of the Democrats' response to what Senator Tim Kane calls a "war on veterans," Kane and others in Trump's audience brought along guests who served in the military. All were just fired by the VA and other federal agencies, where vets comprise about 30% of the workforce.

When one dismissed Forest Service worker, Iraq war vet Jacob Bushno, approached his Congressman back home for help—he got no response from Mike Bost, the Republican chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Instead, Bushno heard from the office of Senator Tammy Duckworth, the Illinois Democrat and former Army helicopter pilot who became a double amputee when she was shot down in Iraq.

Noting that Republicans like Bost always wrap themselves in the flag, Bushno told *The Times* that "he hadn't seen any patriotism out of them since this has been going down."

"Why Is This Happening to Us?"

This emerging rift between right-wing Republicans and one part of their electoral base can be further deepened through more grassroots activism by veterans and their organizations, VA caregivers and their patients, federal worker unions, and even their often unreliable Democratic allies.

On February 19, there was plenty of blue state outrage on display when members and friends of the Federal Unionists Network (FUN) protested DOGE in rallies from the Left Coast to New York City, where 1,000 people gathered in Lower Manhattan's Foley Square to hear speakers like longtime VA defender, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Now, many red-state victims of the Trump-Musk purge are speaking out as well, taking their personal stories to media outlets and public meetings around the country. Army veteran Nelson Feliz, Sr. lost his job in the first wave of VA lay-offs, which Collins claimed would "not negatively impact VA healthcare, benefits, or beneficiaries."

Photo credit: Federal Unionists Network

"We've been betrayed," Feliz told Channel 2 News in Atlanta. "I was a first sergeant. My job was to take care of troops, making sure they were paid, fed, and slept. Why is this happening to us? I've been here too long for this to be happening."

Bushno, the now unemployed National Forest Service worker in Illinois, and Feliz were among the 6,000 vets affected by the dismissal of 20,000 federal workers still in probationary status. In Bushno's case, he was let go seven days before his one-year probationary period ended, a decision he is appealing. Feliz was fired despite having been a VA employee for over 12 years!

He recently started a new position but had not completed the required probationary period. The "Notice of Termination" he received via email stated that "the agency finds, based on your performance, you have not demonstrated that your further employment would be in the public interest." This and other indiscriminate dismissals have been the subject of an ongoing legal challenge by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the progressive veterans' group, Common Defense, and other plaintiffs.

Town Hall Confrontations

AFGE local union leaders like Rebecca Reinhold, vice-president of Local 85 at the VA in Leavenworth, Kansas, have been taking the fight directly to Republican members of Congress—when they dare to attend constituent meetings in their districts. This is already a risky decision for many due to growing popular anger about impending Medicaid and/or Medicare cuts.

In Reinhold's recent videotaped confrontation with US Rep. Mark Alford at a town hall gathering, she reminded Alford that her 1,200 members provide critical services. "We make sure veterans are cared for from the moment they become a veteran," she said. "But you want to cut my job." In response, Alford insisted there would be "appropriate funds for veterans" and that any VA cuts "would not affect services" because "we're going to make sure veterans are supported."

In Oakley, Kansas, US Senator Roger Marshall abruptly ended a contentious town hall meeting when local resident Chuck Nunn questioned the wisdom of laying off so many veterans. His concern was shared by another member of the crowd who declared, "I'm not a Democrat, but I'm worried about the veterans." Marshall did not respond to either comment and left the room hurriedly amid jeers and boos.

In other House member encounters with voters in the southwest recently, it was the same story. Veteran Louis Smith drew approving applause from an East Texas audience when he warned Congressman Pete Sessions that "the guy from South Africa is not doing you any good—he's hurting you more than he's helping."

US Rep Stephanie Bice from Oklahoma heard, during a telephone town hall, from a self-identified Republican and former Army officer, who demanded to know how "some college whiz kids with a computer terminal in Washington, DC… have determined that it's OK to cut veterans benefits?"

"Get Used To It?"

And those skirmishes were before Secretary Collins doubled down on the bad news contained in the leaked memo from his chief of staff, Christopher Syrek, who comes to the VA from KPMG, a corporate consulting firm specializing in outsourcing strategies.

In a March 5 video statement, Collins pledged his fealty to further elimination of "waste and bureaucracy." He claimed, of course, that VA healthcare delivery would not be disrupted because no "mission critical positions" would be impacted. "We'll be making major changes, so get used to it," he said.

In response, SVAC Ranking Member Senator Richard Blumenthal displayed some buyer's remorse of his own. He accused Collins of planning to "roll back the PACT Act"—which expanded health care access to nearly a million post-9/11 veterans—and impeding the agency's "ability to meet increased demand in order to justify privatizing VA."

Just two months ago, Blumenthal and his fellow veteran on the committee, Ruben Gallego from Arizona, were among the 22 Senate Democrats voting to confirm Collins, along with longtime VA privatization foe Bernie Sanders (I-VT.) As their penance for that misguided display of bi-partisanship on Capitol Hill, they will hopefully be holding their own town meetings soon to rally their own distressed constituents, who once donned military uniforms but are now feeling very double-crossed by Chaplain Collins.

Aaron Hughes at a Save the VA demo, May 18, 2018, Chicago.

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon are co-authors of Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends, and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs (Duke University Press). They can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com)

What We Can and Can't Afford

John Ketwig (reviewer)

What We Can and Can't Afford: Essays on Vietnam, Patriotism, and American Life
by W.D. Ehrhart
(*McFarland & Company, 2023)*

Let me say it right up front. Bill Ehrhart has been a friend for many years, and I consider him the most articulate spokesman of all Vietnam veterans. I am always eager to read his latest offerings, and this collection of his essays is especially welcome as we try to understand America in the second reign of Donald J. Trump. It seems everything we believe about our country and its place in the world is under siege, and values such as compassion, understanding, and simple kindness are discouraged.

Bill Ehrhart grew up in Perkasie, Pennsylvania, the son of a protestant clergyman. One evening a few years ago, I attended a Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels concert in Perkasie and took advantage of the opportunity to drive by his father's church and Bill's boyhood home. Even after fifty years, Perkasie is a picturesque suburban bedroom community on the outskirts of Philadelphia, with tree-lined streets and houses designed and constructed to withstand harsh winters.

Bill Ehrhart was a Marine while I was in the Army. He was wounded at the battle for Hue, while I was never wounded except emotionally. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Swarthmore College, a Master of Arts from the University of Illinois, and a PhD from the University of Wales at Swansea, UK. I have a high school diploma and a lot of "experience" in various segments of the automotive business. He has retired from teaching English and history at the Haverford School in Haverford, Pennsylvania. For a time, I taught Toyota technicians how to deal with the latest technologies. Ehrhart has a wife and daughter; I have a wife, two daughters, and three grandchildren. We are both members of Veterans for Peace and VVAW. He has written about ten highly-regarded books, some memoirs, and lots of poetry, and he was featured in several documentaries and TV shows about the war in Vietnam, including Ken Burns' eighteen-hour series for PBS TV.

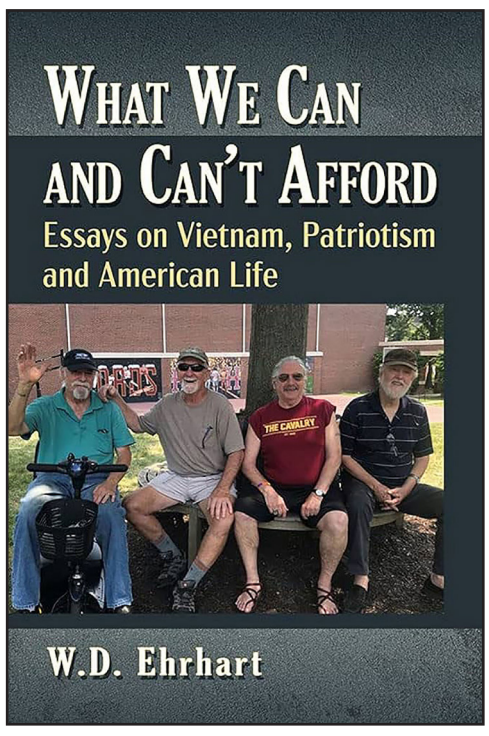
General Westmoreland saw the war in Vietnam as "an opportunity to test our latest weapons and tactics." In that respect, and only in that respect, the war was an overwhelming success. Approximately 58,315 Americans were killed, along with somewhere between three and five million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. Thousands more were maimed, mutilated, burned, punctured, tortured, poisoned, or simply disappeared. We dropped more tons of explosives on Vietnam than were used in all of World War II, about 80% on South Vietnam, our ally and an impoverished agricultural country the size of New Mexico. Napalm swallowed up whole villages in huge balls of flaming gasoline, and a rainbow assortment of chemical weapons like Agent Orange poisoned thousands of acres of fertile farmland and caused birth defects and cancers among the Vietnamese peasants and Americans who handled the stuff. Similar destruction of Laos and Cambodia provided America's military-industrial complex with enormous quantities of "test results" even as it devastated those countries. Laos survived the most intense bombardment in the history of warfare. Here at home, somewhere in the neighborhood of 300,000 Vietnam veterans have taken their own lives since returning from the war. Today, unexploded ordnance continues to maim and kill thousands of Southeast Asian peasants. Bill has returned to Vietnam twice since the war ended, and I have not.

What does all of this have to do with Bill Ehrhart's collection of essays? A large percentage of his work, whether essays or poems, has always been about Vietnam and what the war did to him. Of the 65 essays in *What We Can and Can't Afford*, at least 15 are about the Vietnam War. Another 26 or so are about the state of America, democracy, and the political environment our children and grandchildren will inherit. Ehrhart is brilliant, thoughtful, and incredibly transparent. His outpourings about war in general and the Vietnam War, in particular, are focused upon the horrors, waste, pain, and unfair nature of modern war.

In his Preface, Ehrhart writes: "the opportunity to write about a wide variety of topics and issues have afforded me the opportunity to keep my head from exploding in the face of the increasingly ugly circumstances we are living with today in our nation and the world." Bill Ehrhart has not been without criticism for sharing his observations and opinions. In this very newspaper, in the Fall of 2023, a VVAW member critiqued *What We Can and Can't Afford*, writing "that is the culture we live in now. Ehrhart may rant and rave about it but can't change it. Can we 'afford' it? Can we do something about it? Do we have alternatives and enough people who can commit to such changes to make it possible?" Later, the reviewer backtracks a little: "this is a tough road to walk. I pay homage to Ehrhart for writing what needs to be said and for having the clarity to say it, but, like climate change, I want to do something about it constructively." Writing is Ehrhart's construction project, and there are unlimited opportunities available to others.

I hope Bill Ehrhart will continue writing far into the future. He is, above all, a thinker, and he has not allowed himself to be swallowed up by the torrent of pseudo-conservative or neoliberal warmongering that has become prevalent in our politics and, yes, our culture in the past ten years. Yes, we heard the sword rattling of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and paid it little mind. Over the years, that perverted perspective evolved into Ronald Reagan and the Bushes, and ultimately, Donald Trump. Today, in 2025, it is tempting to throw up our hands and capitulate to the likes of Elon Musk (with his chainsaw), Stephen Miller, Marjorie Taylor Green, Jim Jordan, Linda McMahon, Ron DeSantis, or Kristy Noem. But no, we read Noam Chomsky, Chris Hedges, Michael Moore, Bill Astore, or Bill Ehrhart. The conservatives and corporations have bought up American politics. However, there is still a strong undercurrent of opinion and literature that reflects compassion and faith in the basic goodness of the American common man and woman. The Democratic party has lost that perspective; newspapers have either sold out or shrunk to an ineffective shadow of what once was a definitive industry. However, those progressive theories still exist … and gather votes from many baby boomers and the Millennial generations.

Bill Ehrhart offers an endless stream of observations that celebrate our finest American values. His suggestions radiate common sense and even optimism as he informs us of personalities and situations we may not have recognized. His essays are always coherent, thought-provoking, and worthwhile. He recognizes personalities like Paul Fussel, Daniel Ellsberg, Horace Coleman, General Smedley Butler, and one of the originators of VVAW, Jan Barry. He writes about gun control, gerrymandering, turning 30 years old, the group who broke into an FBI building in Media, PA, back in the Vietnam years and stole files, and numerous references to the sad incompetence of our 45th president, who is now also our 47th. He writes about family, PTSD, life in the suburbs back in the sixties, government corruption, and the direction his country, the human race, and the planet are headed. He writes about the people of Southeast Asia and his feelings of guilt for what we did to them.



Deep down inside, Bill Ehrhart is just an educated suburban family man who cares. Do his 65 essays chart a course toward a better future for his country and its people? No, but he cares, and he has tried to offer a collection of observations and suggestions that have been fermenting in his soul for many years. Will the world notice? They already have, asking him to submit his opinions in writing to many of the country and the world's most prestigious publications. He has spoken at many schools, colleges, and universities and to civic and social groups.

Hey, the time spent reading a book can be worthwhile, but there are no guarantees. I highly recommend you read *What We Can and Can't Afford*. If you disagree with it, there are 65 convenient places where you can set it aside and look for another book. But, if you are reading *The Veteran*, I think you will find a treasure chest of ideas that will offset or contradict about 95% of the evening news and the front page of tomorrow's newspaper (if you still get one). I think you will find that Bill Ehrhart has spent much of his life doing his best to shine a light on life in these United (?) States. His descriptions and conclusions, over the past sixty-odd years, have been illuminated and inspiring. Nobody does it better.

John Ketwig is a lifetime member of VVAW and the author of …and a hard rain fell, A G.I.'s True Story of the War in Vietnam, and Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter. He is hoping to find a publisher for his first novel.

Trigger Finger

It's followed me throughout my life
A product of the war and strife
My right arm for so long it carried
Long before my wife I married
The force inside my lizard brain
Controls my fist oh please explain
The faceless shapes that wreck my sleep
And fear too tangled and too deep
That's buried somewhere in my head
Left scars where peace should be instead
Some wounds don't fade, they only linger
It started with my trigger finger

—*Jim Hale*

26 August 71

Monday is my ETS.
55 years since
Private E-1 Levy,
one badge
five ribbons
five article 15s
two court-martials
5 days stockade
departed the Army
hitching a ride
from his court-martial
secretary, spending
the night with her,
next morning,
a bus to Boston.
55 years, Vietnam
Never a day away.

—*Marc Levy*

Darkness

Tony Cokely

It was dark. Billy was in the jungle. He heard the noise again. Where was it coming from? What could be making the noise? His left cheek was warm and sweaty. He was afraid. He strained to hear through the darkness. He wished he could just get a fix on that sound. He squinted at the shadows. Why was it so dark? He couldn't even see his hands before his face. Maybe he had just heard routine noises and spooked himself into imagining something out there. He had been here too long. How many days until he could go home? The military called going home "rotation." That is a funny word for it. In other wars, you fought until you won or lost. In this ugly mother, you fought until you died or rotated.

How many days until I can leave, he wondered. It almost seems like I did leave and then came back, he thought. Wait a minute! Wait a minute! He had been home. The war had been over. How did he get back here? Had he dreamed of going home? Shhh……. He heard a squeak, then a farump. His eyes flew open.

He was lying with his head on her leg. Six inches from his face was the source of the noise. It was the dream again—the dream with him back in the jungle. Will the dreams ever stop, he thought. And who was this naked lady?

She raised her head and said, "Sorry! It happens when I drink beer." She was in her early thirties. She must have been a knockout in her school days. Her face was a little puffy around her eyes, with wrinkles at the corners. Her eyes were a pale green with little flecks of gold. Her hair was a sandy color, speckled lightly with grey. She had small freckles on her shoulders. Her nipples were the size of half dollars with erect tips like the erasers on wooden pencils.

"Well, do I pass?" she asked. "You were inspecting me. It is as if you are seeing me for the first time", she added.

Billy said nothing. He wasn't sure for the moment that she was talking to him. Was this the dream, or was he awake and back in the world? He raised himself on one elbow and immediately dropped back on the bed.

He looked around the room. "Could I please have some aspirin and a glass of water?" he asked.

She moved so quickly he was almost rocked off her bed; His head felt like it was swimming in Jell-O being worked over by a jackhammer. He groaned as the bed stopped moving. Then she bounced back beside him with the water and the pills. He closed his eyes and reached for her hands. After a while, he dozed off.

When he woke, he felt better. He rose and examined her apartment. It was tidy, small, and organized in a functional manner. "Hello", he cried. No answer. Had she gone somewhere? Billy didn't know, but he knew he would be embarrassed to admit that he didn't remember her name.

He began to look through her things. The letter he found was addressed to "Ms. Suzanne Marie Cate." Great, he thought. Was it Sue, Susan, or Suzanne? Or maybe it was Marie? He opened the letter to read the salutation.

"You're a nosy little fuck aren't you?" she said. "I think it's time for you to get your things and get out of my house." She was looking at him like he was a bag lady. He set her mail down and began, "I just….."

"Get out before I throw you out," she said.

The cold air braced him as he descended the stairs outside her apartment. "Don't think we had anything; you were too drunk to do anything but sleep," she shouted down after him and slammed the door.

At least he could still piss a woman off, he thought. Billy wondered when things had really started going wrong for him. It was easy to blame the war and the nightmares, but maybe there was more to it than that.

Bill's only real friend before the war had been another Susie. He started walking home. As he walked, he hummed, "One, Two, Three, Four, we don't want your fucking war."

He was thinking back to high school and that other Susie. She had left him, and then he was drafted. Before that, he thought, "Susie and Bill," as if they were one person. But she was her own person, and now she had three kids, a house in the country, and a rich husband. Billy had never been drunk or had a nightmare when he was with Susie before the war.

The last time he was with her, it wasn't cheating. Susie was engaged, and Billy was just back in the world. They both needed that one last time. It didn't help when he woke that night fighting and screaming through the first of his many war dreams.

He was sober two weeks ago when he had seen Susie at the market. Sober for eighteen months. He still had the chip in his pocket. She had a full cart and was crossing to her car. He helped her with the groceries. She didn't say much. She just watched him with a sad and worried look. As she pulled away, she stopped, rolled down the window, and motioned him over to the car. He leaned down towards her and she stuffed three twenties into his shirt pocket. "Buy something nice, Billy," she said and drove off towards her castle in the country.

It would be easy to put the blame there for his binge. She had insulted him, and he had gone and gotten drunk. But it was on him. Billy had learned that at group. Each of us is responsible for our actions—no passing the buck. She didn't hold the bottle to his lips. She didn't force him to take that first drink.

Billy was ashamed of himself. He had sailed through his mom's death and funeral. And when his dad died six months later, it was almost a relief. Mom had cancer and suffered through two years of poking and probing. Dad had at least passed quickly. Dad had a heart attack while mowing the lawn and drove himself to the hospital, where he died three hours later.

Billy now lived in a studio unit in the apartments he had inherited. Dad had considered the apartments as his pension. Now, they were Billy's.

Billy didn't need the three twenties and he didn't need to be reminded that he only didn't need the money because of his dad. All he really needed was for the drinking and the nightmares of the war to stop.

He felt in his pocket for a quarter to call his sponsor. He thought this was a good time to start over again. Maybe he would just have one drink first.

Tony Cokely was drafted into the Marine Corps and served from 1969 to 1971. He retired after 29 years as a government employee, proud union member, and officer. He lives in the California foothills.

Trump Throws Zelenskyy Out of the White House in Embarrassing Meltdown
DID YOU SEE HOW I DID THAT? I YELLED AND SCREECHED AND GOT MAD AND CALLED HIM NAMES AND SAID HE WAS UNGRATEFUL AND TOLD HIM OFF AND STOMPED MY FOOT AND...
YOU WERE WONDERFUL...
WAR
MOM
Mar 1 2025 (10549)
DANZIGER
The Rutland Herald
Counterpoint Media Syndicate

Trading One Uniform for Another: The Military to Prison Pipeline

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon (reviewers)

Prisoners After War: Veterans in the Age of Mass Incarceration
by Jason Higgins
(University of Massachusetts Press, 2024)

Like old soldiers around the country, a group of former service members gathered in Crest Hill, Illinois, to remember fallen comrades on Memorial Day, 2024. Several months later, *The Veteran*, a newspaper published by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, ran a photo of the event they attended. It shows a multi-generational group of white, Black, and Latino men lined up proudly between two flags.

In his dispatch to the paper, African-American Navy veteran Robert Maury explained why everyone in the Stateville Veterans Group was wearing government-issued clothing of a non-military sort. As Maury wrote, "This was the first time in the history of Stateville, if not the first time in the history of the state of Illinois, that incarcerated veterans were allowed to organize a Memorial Day ceremony in a maximum-security prison."

There would not be another such event because, late last year, the Illinois Department of Corrections closed this century-old facility. The Veterans Group there was forced to disband; its members dispersed to other prisons around the state, where some hoped to plant seeds for future veteran-initiated programs at their new addresses.

How did these vets and 180,000 others end up in a US prison population now numbering more than 1.2 million? And what can be done to keep other former service members out of jail in the future? These are questions that Jason Higgins, a Virginia Tech researcher, explores in his new book, *Prisoners After War,* which is particularly timely in light of President Joe Biden's December 12, 2024 pardon of a small group of veterans convicted of non-violent crimes, including long ago drug offenses.

Higgins and John Kindler, an associate professor of history from Oklahoma State University, have also produced an edited collection called *Service Denied*. That volume, with multiple contributors, offers a broader historical perspective on the post-war mistreatment of former soldiers, including the hundreds of veterans who were born abroad, served in the military, ended up in prison, and then were deported after their release.

Mass Incarceration

Higgins calls his study a "social history of veterans in the age of mass incarceration." It links their experience in foreign wars and related problems transitioning back to civilian life to changes in the criminal justice system that put millions of men and women behind bars during an ongoing domestic crackdown on crime.

Fifty years after the official end of US intervention in southeast Asia, "Vietnam vets are still the single largest population of war veterans in prison, illustrating the profound and lasting impact of the 'war on crime' on their generation."

As Higgins reports, the broader US trend of "criminalizing and punishing people with behavioral and social problems"—due to their being non-white, unemployed, unhoused, and/or drug dependent—led to a doubling in the number of vets in prison between the end of that war and 9/11. The author finds, however, that the "history of incarcerated veterans is not exclusively a story of racial injustice."

In *Prisoners After War*, we learn that white veterans are much more likely to go to prison compared to white civilians, while Black vets are slightly less likely to be jailed than African Americans who never served. Overall, about one-third of all veterans, who number 19 million, report having been arrested and booked into jail at least once in their lives, as compared to less than one-fifth of the rest of the population.

When they end up incarcerated, veterans receive longer sentences than non-veterans despite the good work of a national network of Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs). As Higgins documents in great detail, this "hybrid drug and mental health treatment system" offers access to counseling services, opportunities for housing, education and job employment, and disability benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

As a diversion program, VTCs "have the lowest recidivism rates in the nation" and, according to the author, "could serve as a model for greater criminal justice reform." However, the effectiveness of their "reparative justice" approach varies from state to state and is not available to vets charged with violent crimes, which disqualifies many defendants.

Betrayed and Abandoned

Higgins builds his book around personal stories he collected for the Incarcerated Veterans Oral History Project. He interviewed scores of veterans still imprisoned and out of jail, police officers and judges, and fellow vets who have become VTC volunteers and helpers. One common theme among those who end up in legal trouble is feeling betrayed and abandoned. That's because they've been denied the services and benefits—or opportunities for citizenship—promised by military recruiters, charged with filling the ranks of an "all-volunteer force" with poor and working-class youth since 1973.

Their exclusion from the few perks of "veteranhood" occurred when pre-existing mental health issues or service-related medical conditions led to misconduct while in uniform and resulted in military discipline. As Higgins notes, punitive discharges first became widespread during the Vietnam era, even before conscription was suspended.

"Thousands of African-Americans were excessively punished for minor offenses, behavioral issues, acts of resistance and drug use," he writes. "As the military began to withdraw forces from Vietnam, a disproportionate number of Black soldiers received administrative discharges compared to whites, disqualifying them from VA care, disability compensation, and the GI Bill."

These punitive discharges left many Black combat veterans—more likely than others to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)—without access to much-needed treatment programs and disability pay. As one government study found in 1981, their resulting "readjustment difficulties increased the likelihood of incarceration."

More than 300,000 veterans who served at home and abroad since 9/11 also received less than "honorable" discharges. The Department of Defense (DOD) often made such determinations without uniform disciplinary standards across military branches or even among individual commanders within the same branch. For the DOD, despite its ample $884 billion budget, getting rid of soldiers whose performance is adversely affected by PTSD, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), military sexual trauma (MST), and drug or alcohol abuse is easier, quicker, and cheaper than treating them.

The Stigma of "Bad Paper"

Being drummed out of the military in this fashion, without even a court-martial, has lasting consequences. As civilians, "bad paper" holders aren't eligible for preferential treatment when applying for public sector jobs. The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans won't even let them join. According to Swords to Plowshares, a San Francisco-based advocacy group, vets stigmatized in this fashion are more likely to have mental health conditions and are also twice as likely to commit suicide.

A Syracuse University study found that "minorities and women were disproportionately represented among veterans with bad paper" due to "racial inequities in the military's criminal justice system and the number of women who struggle with MST." Those who seek their discharge upgrade face a long legal fight, which is why, in the waning days of the Obama Administration, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) "called for the outgoing president to issue a full pardon for every veteran with a bad paper discharge."

Unlike most other veterans' organizations, the VVA has long distinguished itself not just as an advocate for disabled vets but for those in prison as well. In 2017, as Higgins reports, VVA helped win passage of the Fairness to Veterans Act, which reformed the individual appeals process for "bad paper veterans diagnosed with PTSD or a TBI."

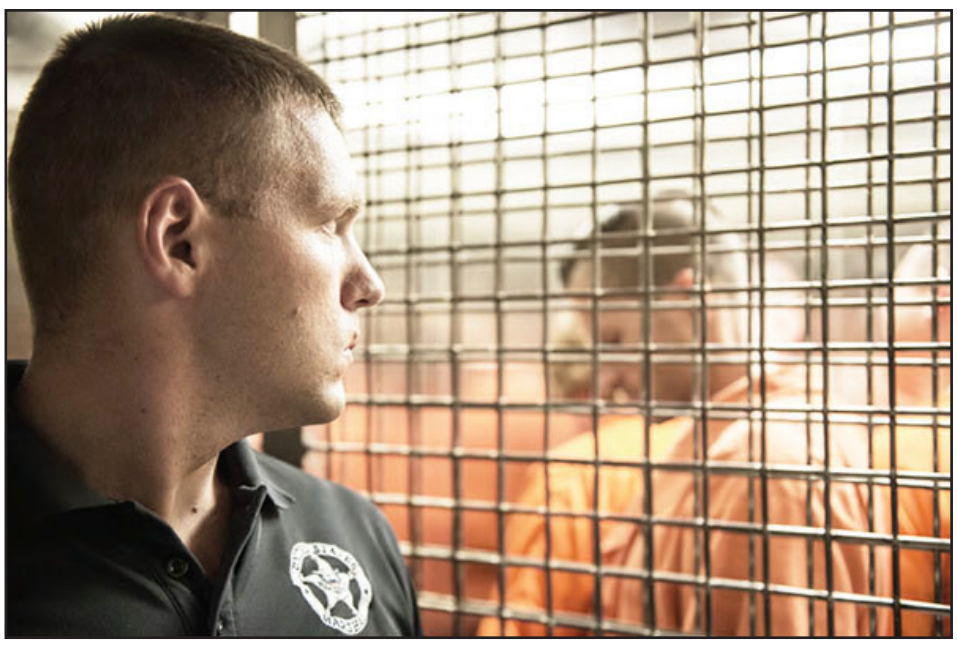
Unfortunately, Barack Obama left office without acting on the VVA's appeal for broader clemency. Seven years later, Biden did pardon a few of the many LGBTQ service members court-martialed and kicked out of the military before the DOD's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was repealed in 2011. (Months after this much-publicized action, only eight had applied.)

So Swords to Plowshares, Minority Veterans of America, the Black Veterans Project, and two veterans' legal clinics tried again with Biden late last year. In a December 6 letter, they reminded him that past "administrative separations and resulting denial of critical veterans' benefits" are "a life sentence," that can result in a greater risk of substance abuse, joblessness, homelessness, incarceration, and self-harm.

A week later, Biden did grant clemency to 15 military veterans (out of 1,500 other people who got pardons or commutations on the same day). The recipients were mainly officers and NCOs aged 46 to 79, with honorable discharges and military decorations, who committed some lesser offense long ago and then, in the words of the White House, "turned their lives around."

But Biden, before leaving office in January, failed to erase the stain of "bad paper" from the records of the many veterans who tried to serve honorably but got fired from their jobs in the military with little or no due process but lasting adverse consequences.

Veterans behind bars—like the ones who celebrated Memorial Day in Stateville last May—also did not see their names on any additional presidential pardon lists issued before January 20. For them, Biden's claim that America "was built on the promise of possibility and second chances" sounded much like the spiel some got from military recruiters, who signed them up as teenagers and helped put them on the road from one government-issued uniform to another.



United States Marshals Service, photo by Shane T. McCoy.

Steve Early and Suzanne Gordon are the co-authors of Our Veterans: Winners, Losers, Friends and Enemies on the New Terrain of Veterans Affairs (Duke University Press). Gordon is also a co-founder of the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute and two previous books on the veterans' healthcare system. They can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com

Everything is Going to be Okay

Lawrence Markworth

I joined the Navy days after the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of '62. I always thought I'd enlisted out of patriotic duty to save the world from Communism because I didn't have anything else to do. Never heard of Vietnam. Perhaps I was in denial of what lay ahead.

I loathed public school, concluding that college wasn't my cup of tea. My savior in high school was two and a half years of auto shop. All my other classes were a contemptible undertaking. I loved automobiles, and repairing them gave me a sense of accomplishment and pride. In my senior year, on the stage of the school auditorium, in front of all my classmates, I was awarded for being the top of my class in the auto shop. The prize was a new toolbox and tools. That ceremony and the day I graduated were my happiest times in high school. I still own that toolbox in a storage area behind my garage. It's no longer in use. I've tried to give it away, but I can't part with it.

The place I called home was not safe. As if I was Odysseus escaping the Cyclops Polyphemus on Sicily, I was out of there, running straight to the gates of hell, and I hadn't a clue. Until I got off the bus at the US Navy Recruit Depot San Diego, and everyone in authority was yelling at me, telling me I was a piece of shit. Then I knew I'd made a mistake. And when my company commander, a scrawny-ass fuck of a twisted Chief Petty Officer, hit me in the jaw while marching on the parade grounds, like a hard knock-on wood to each beat of his words: Markworth-you-start-off-a-left-oblique-on-your-right-foot, tears in my eyes from the pain and humiliation of each blow. Once again, I knew—I wasn't safe. Damn, I was angry. Hitting me was uncalled for; I'd had enough of that at home. What was the point? Just tell me what I did wrong, and I'll correct it. Yes, of course, I had the sense that if we were to go to war, I wouldn't be safe. I never dreamed my Navy superiors would violate my physical security.

While home on leave in '63, a week before my two-year deployment on the USS Castor in the South China Sea offshore Vietnam, my father had a heart attack. The thud of him hitting the floor woke me from a deep sleep. As I entered my parents' bedroom—not far from my father's hand—a burning cigarette scarred the hardwood floor where he had fallen. He wasn't breathing.

My sister and mother screamed, "Lawrence, do something!"

Emergency skills, drilled into my head during months of Navy training, kicked in. I performed CPR, he did not respond. I worked on him for what seemed like hours, but it was probably just a few minutes. The firemen arrived and asked me to leave the bedroom. I went into the living room and anxiously waited. Mom called our family doctor, and he arrived. He had saved my life when I was seven, corrected an appendectomy gone wrong just in time as a day later would have been too late. I felt his savior's presence. Then I heard Dad in a clear, understanding voice that I still recall as if it was just a few days ago.

"Lawrence, everything is going to be okay."

I ran into the room just as the firemen were covering his body and face with a blanket.

"No, no," I yelled, "he just spoke to me."

"I'm sorry, Larry. His heart probably arrested before he hit the floor. There's nothing else you could have done," the doctor said.

I didn't believe him. For over thirty years, I thought I had performed CPR incorrectly. I carried and owned that guilt.

The deployment offshore Vietnam on the USS Castor, a supply ship, was hell on water. Dealing with uncertain weather, from flat calm in extreme heat and humidity to typhoons with gale force winds with waves as big aircraft carriers. There were long hours on watch in the hot and humid engine room, repairing old and outdated electrical equipment always in need of maintenance, and hurry-up-and-wait when re-supplying ships in the South China Sea. It was called underway replenishment (UNREPS). Combat ships alongside us, often one on our port and one on our starboard simultaneously for hours, while we winched over on thick wire cables, cargo net after cargo net of toilet paper, mops, clothing, spare parts, etc. At UNREPS, you cannot leave your assigned station unless relieved by a shipmate. Often, these could be ten, twelve, or fourteen-hour assignments or longer.

During this time, I endured my grief for my father. Terribly homesick, missing California and friends and family and thinking, in a dark place, that I would never return home. Some tragedy would befall us, and I'd die on that godforsaken ship.

When onshore, I tried to drown my guilt and grief in beer, whiskey, and prostitutes. It did help when I was drunk and with the women, but the next morning, the pain would return, along with a miserable hangover. The next night, I'd do it again if we were in port and I had some cash.

While serving on the Castor, we changed homeports from Yokosuka to Sasebo, Japan, to be closer to the South China Sea and Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August '64. Nagasaki was an hour's train ride from Sasebo.

I had a good friend, a shipmate, David Nagai, a fellow electrician's mate who was Japanese American, born in a relocation camp in the US during WWII. He was keenly interested in Japanese history and insisted we visit the museum at ground zero in Nagasaki. I reluctantly agreed to go with him. Luckily, we were wearing civvies, not our dress blues, for it was only 20 years after the end of the war, and the wound of their gruesome defeat was still deeply embedded in the Japanese people.

I was not prepared for what I saw in the museum. Displays: beer bottles melted, in the intense heat of the weapon. Photos: children, women, men, skin gone, burned off. Shadows of human beings permanently inked on the side of a flashed-bleached white building; their bodies disappeared: melted, burned, or disintegrated. Photographs of blocks and blocks and blocks of rubble, nothing standing except one large concrete smokestack at the edge of town. I was overwhelmed.

Then, I saw an old, disfigured woman who could barely walk. She shuffled with her cane from one exhibit to the next; tears flowed, her bent spine forcing her focus on the floor. I walked in the opposite direction, another section of the museum. While I studied a display, a ghost slid up next to me. I glanced down at the old woman. With difficulty, she turned her head and looked up at me. Much of her face was missing. Her one eye burned into me as if to ask, "Why?"

My mind suddenly opened to questions. Did we commit an atrocity? Is this what we do to non-Caucasian peoples and nations, mostly civilians, who challenge our authority and military might? Do our dead Vietnamese civilian casualties look like this? And you, Lawrence Louis Markworth, my sad, grieving sailor, are part of this killing machine. In the middle of my four-year enlistment, this was the beginning of my hatred of war, my moral injury. This was the end of innocence, the seed of peace planted in the warrior.

Somehow, I dropped the museum incident into the cellar of my denial, in good company with my childhood trauma and the grief for my father. In moments of weakness, when the cellar door threatened to open, and the demons peeked in on my true self, I would slam it shut again with alcohol and sex.

Even my father's speaking to me, after his death, while his soul was leaving his body, that "everything was going to be okay" was a truth he knew then. No, not in one year or five, but I discovered his truth eleven years after his death. Fifty years ago, when I was twenty-nine and she was twenty-one, I met the love of my life. We're still together.

Yes, Dad, everything is going to be okay.

A chapter from my in progress "Rowing Through a Sea of Rubble: a Warrior's Journey Home." A memoir of loss, love and forgiveness.

Lawrence Markworth is a Vietnam Veteran, retired librarian, author, and dream group facilitator. He holds a B.A. in geography and a Master's in library science from UCLA.

Barry Romo is not Dead

Barry Romo is not Dead.

His life became a symbol, He became a

Spokesman.

He became an Idea, the Idea is Alive,

It has always been ...

There is a Memory, but

Barry Romo is not Dead

—Alan Donohue

Getting Out of That Place

I could not make him immortal
with my words
Had turned on the wooden radio in Hong Kong
BBC announcer said Beatles no more
There went the sun
Days of Future all done passed
Moody Tuesdays in red dust
how the elephant grass made Point Man cuss
An hallucinogenic time warp
we sang and banged those tin cups in unison
Table tops - to The Animals!
at the Enlisted Club, Fort Hood
A jungled Gadda da Vida
had not been his garden of eden
Tây Ninh Province 1970
But I surely brought him back to life

—John Crandell

The Pope Accused of Misrepresentation

Bill Potvin

Pope Francis boiled it down simply to "this is cruelty, this is not war." The Israeli Foreign Ministry responded quickly, saying, "the Pope's remarks are particularly disappointing as they are disconnected from the true and factual context of Israel's fight against jihadist terrorism," adding, "a multi-front war that was forced upon it starting Oct 7th. The blame should be directed solely at the terrorists, not at the democracy defending itself against them."

Hello! Such statements are wildly false. Despite the denial of all reporters access to Gaza and the killing of over 160 Palestinian journalists, the barbarism can not and has not been hidden. There are too many smartphone videos! Millions of world citizens have viewed these horrific acts for over a year now. Humanitarians and historians worldwide have mutually condemned Israel's hateful genocide.

All the human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have stated that the slaughter and denial of life's essentials is a clear violation of the rules of war established after the Nuremberg Trials and the Geneva Convention. Hitler's unbridled racism and reign of terror is back…this time for the world to see live (unless you get your news from corporate television). Big media, whether it's conservative or liberal, fails to report the truth about Palestine, including the unfettered supply of bombs and weaponry needed for ruthless destruction and unrelenting genocide.

Perhaps history will someday judge these actions as an uncivilized low point…the last vestiges of cruel colonialism where annihilation was the goal and suffering was ignored. The Pope and others that stand against apartheid, including Jewish Voice for Peace and Not in My Name and other sane organizations like the Veterans For Peace, will be respected for their morality and courage, as they should be.

Bill Potvin attended artillery O.C.S. at Fort Sill after college. He dropped out and went to Vietnam as an E-1, did one tour, and finished as a Spec. 5 demolition specialist.

1965: A Sailor Recalls the First Year of the "American War"

Joe Miller

Reprinted from
The Veteran, Spring 2015.

Yep, I was there—but not really "there." As a US sailor during the 1965 build-up and increased intensity of action against Vietnam, this was a year of change for me—for many of us, inside and outside the military.

Nineteen-sixty-four ended with our ship's return to the States from the Western Pacific (WestPac) in mid-December, and I was doing some serious rethinking about my place in this "place"—that is, as a crew member on the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-14).

In 1964, I lost my top secret clearance, got kicked out of the Naval Security Group in Taiwan, married Hui-fang, and was transferred to sea duty on board the Ticonderoga in June. Then there were the Tonkin Gulf "incidents," which, if I had not thought about war in Vietnam before, certainly provoked more thought and introspection. We lost three pilots and two enlisted crew members, one of which just disappeared while we were at sea. The crew searched the ship for a couple of days, but we never found him. Oh, and I cast my first ballot (absentee) in a presidential election—for Barry Goldwater.

My shipboard duties had also changed. I no longer worked in the Weapons Department Office. The ship's chaplains required a petty officer (I was E-4) to help run their office and the ship's library and take responsibility for setting up religious services. So, I was transferred to that office, which also meant that I was to supervise three other enlisted men.

After reaching San Diego, I took leave to fly back to the Chicago area, where Hui-fang lived with my parents. She had arrived in the States in November 1964. We spent Christmas and New Year's together.

Our ship would be sailing to San Francisco for an extended (six-month) dry dock period before our next cruise to Westpac and offshore operations in Vietnam waters. So, Hui-fang and I made plans for her to fly to San Francisco, where I would find us an apartment for that period.

Once the ship arrived at Hunter's Point shipyard in late January, I found a small studio apartment just outside of Chinatown. Hui-fang arrived a few days later, and we began our first extended time together as a married couple.

Each day, I took the bus to Hunter's Point to carry out my shipboard duties, strolling through the unknown mix of chemical dust kicked up by the construction crews (perhaps a little less toxic than the aviation fuel fumes we all breathed in during operations at sea). Then, I would catch the bus back to our apartment each evening (except for the occasional duty night). It was almost a normal situation.

Since we lived within walking distance of Chinatown, we would often shop there. Hui-fang kept herself busy with English lessons. We would go to the movies together and take long walks around the city. Sometime in March, we learned that she was pregnant with our first child—the doctor said the child would be born sometime in late October or early November. Our ship was due to return to Vietnam duty sometime in the fall.

This period in a semi-civilian state, not spending twenty-four hours a day captive on board the ship, also allowed me to seek answers to some of the questions that had arisen since the 1964 "incidents." Of course, everything else happening around us during this period—the Free Speech Movement, the civil rights struggle, the early sprouts of the counterculture movement—also provoked thought and more profound questions. It all seemed connected, at least in my mind.

We were bombing the shit out of North Vietnam with "Rolling Thunder"; the first official combat troops had been sent to Danang; students and civil rights marchers were being attacked here at home; teach-ins about Vietnam were now being held on campuses all over the country. What was going on? So, I began to read everything.

This great bookstore was just off Union Square, where one could buy books and magazines on any subject. One of the first books in this effort was William A. Williams' *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. This opened my eyes to another perspective on the US role in the world, something other than the usual American celebration.

What about our deepening involvement in Vietnam and US policy in Asia? Bernard Fall's *The Two Vietnams* helped to answer many questions and raise more. I found books by the Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett of great value in getting a view of the "other side," especially his *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War*. I also read everything I could on the civil rights struggle and the student movement. I regularly shocked the hell out of the Nation of Islam folks when I would buy their paper on the street while in uniform. *Ramparts* magazine became a main staple of mine; my subscription was mailed to me on the ship. I wanted anything that would counter the official political and media line at the time.

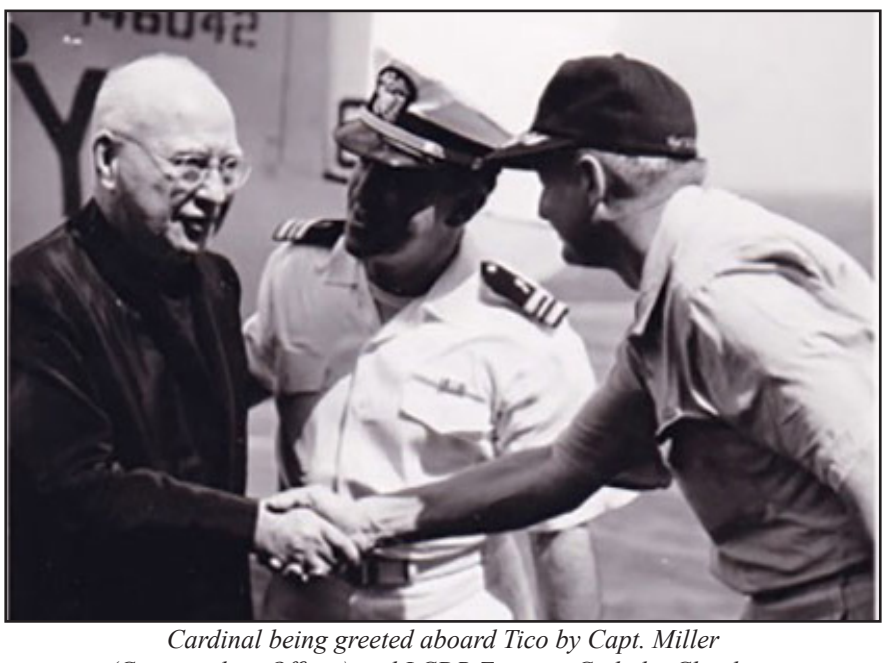
Since I was solely responsible for ordering books for the ship's library, a relatively large space on a carrier, I combed through the US Navy supply catalogs for any books on Vietnam. As a result, the Ticonderoga probably had the best collection about Vietnam of any ship in the Seventh Fleet. If the ship's crew and the aircrews were going to rest and relax in our air-conditioned space, they would have the opportunity to pick up a book about the war in which they/we were involved.

In June, the ship was scheduled to leave dry dock and return to San Diego. My time with Hui-fang was ending; she would return to my parents' place. I took leave, we packed up our stuff, and we got on a train back to Chicago. We spent our first anniversary on that train on June 9. We arrived in Chicago three days later. I had to report back to the ship in San Diego by June 30, so we had a couple of weeks completely away from the Navy.

The day I had to fly from O'Hare Airport to San Diego is burned in my memory. My dad drove Hui-fang and me to the airport. She was in tears and sobbed that she did not want to see me go. Of course, I felt the same, but there was no option. She stayed in the car while Dad walked me to the gate. We had no idea when I might be back or when the next Westpac cruise would start.

Once back in San Diego, the crew learned the ship would return to the war earlier than many hoped. LBJ announced increases in combat troop deployment to more than 100,000. Many of us sat in the ship's lounge and watched the riots in Watts. What was happening? On August 19, I wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Navy Retention Task Force, explaining why I would never re-enlist.

We finally left San Diego on September 28, heading for operational readiness inspections (ORI) off Hawaii (a little over a week, as I recall).



Cardinal being greeted aboard Tico by Capt. Miller (Commanding Officer) and LCDR Zemites, Catholic Chaplain.

We were in port at Pearl Harbor for a week or so; I would leave the ship to walk around Oahu. We were filling time until the inevitable departure for the war zone.

By October 25, the ship had officially entered Westpac's operational zone. By this time, it was clear that I would not be around for the birth of our first child.

By November 5, we were officially "on-line" (in the combat zone), carrying out air operations against the "enemy." The heavy bombing of North Vietnam as part of "Rolling Thunder" was now a part of our duty whenever we were on "Yankee Station" (in the North). Support operations were part of our duty on "Dixie Station" in the South. Three carriers at a time shared this responsibility off the coast of Vietnam. Those not "on-line" could go to liberty ports in the Philippines or Japan. The pilots and the air and deck crews did most of the heavy lifting in this process. However, we were all a part of it, no matter what our jobs might be.

My job left me with lots of time to think and worry. What was going on back home? How was Hui-fang doing with the pregnancy? I got letters from her and my family members trying to keep me updated. In the so-called "war zone," mail did not always get to the ship on a timely basis. I did not want to be there.

I did not see any purpose in being there or in any of us, Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines, being there. My feelings were personal, sure. They were also political as a direct result of my experiences and reading about this war's origins. There was no turning back for me in 1965.

As I have written elsewhere, operations during this first "on-line" period prevented me from even learning of the birth of our daughter, Lisa Ellen Hui-mei, until a week had passed. The telegram was dated November 12, but I did not get it until November 19. I was happy and pissed off at the same time. I should have been with my wife and baby daughter.

Another significant event from this first period of "on-line" operations in 1965 is the accidental loss of one of our fighter planes and the pilot on November 30. Of course, we had lost planes and pilots from other accidents and combat before. This time, the F-8 Crusader that went overboard not far from Japan was carrying nuclear weapons. None but very few of the officers and crew knew this at the time. [See "US-Japan Ties Worsen on News That Warhead Was Lost in 1965," *New York Times*, May 9, 1989].

When this first "on-line" period ended on December 2, we headed for some in-port time in Yokosuka, Japan. I went on a tour and bought souvenirs for my wife and other family members. I must point out this difference with those in more direct combat-related operations. We had these breaks from war operations regularly, while those in the field might only get one R&R period during their tour of duty if they lived that long.

We were back "on-line" by December 21. Since LBJ announced a temporary bombing halt in northern Vietnam as part of his so-called "peace offensive," we would end the year engaged in flight operations, mainly in the South. This meant that our time on "Dixie Station" might be relatively calm.

So, we were treated to some special visitors. No, it wasn't the Beatles, the Beach Boys, or even the Kinks. You would have thought it was World War II or Korea.

On December 22, we were entertained by fifty-year-old Martha Raye, the famous comic actress and singer. She had been entertaining the troops in-country and decided to fly out to us for a show. It was great; she was well-received. This was entertainment from our fathers' generation. It was a nice distraction, in any case.

Four days later, the ship was visited by another "entertainer," Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, the mentor and sponsor of the late Ngo Dinh Diem and opponent of liberalization inside the Catholic Church. He held a late Christmas mass on the hangar deck, surrounded by the machines of war, a war he certainly supported. The Chaplains' Office crew had to ensure the set-up was ready, and I had some small part in the service. Our Catholic Chaplain, LCDR Zemites, was a proponent of the changes made by Pope John XXIII, so I often wondered what they talked about in private. Following the service, the Cardinal left, and our next visitors flew right in behind him.

Bob Hope brought his Christmas Tour out to a ship at sea for the first time in his career. Again, it has a World War II feel here, but with younger female entertainers. Movie star Carroll Baker and singer-dancer Joey Heatherton were the big draws for this crew of nearly 4,000 men. There were the usual Hope jokes, with efforts to make them current by attacking "draft-dodgers" and making fun of the Beatles. A lot of that fell flat with this younger generation of rock 'n rollers who were not sure they wanted to be out here.

As the year ended, we were headed for another port visit to Subic Bay. I would celebrate the New Year knowing that I already had orders stateside for my final duty station in the Navy. By February 18, 1966, I would be back with my wife and meet my three-month-old daughter for the first time.

However, the war was heating up. It would be with us all for years to come.

Joe Miller, US Navy, 1961-1968, Naval Security Group, 1961-1964, USS Ticonderoga, 1964-1966.

Romeo and Tuyet: A Love Story

Jane Barton Griffith

I was nervous. We were meeting after fifty years. Sam was my first love. We dated in high school and college but lost touch. Now, what a coincidence—a young man and a young woman from Melrose, a small town, a northern suburb of Boston, who had both served in Vietnam. The chances were minuscule. Sam met me on Main Street in Melrose in a small restaurant with fake leather booths. Sam carried a bouquet. The waitresses thought we were married and celebrating our anniversary. No, we were both married to other people and were meeting to become reacquainted and sharing the remarkable fact that we'd both been in Vietnam. Sam served as an officer in Vietnam, based 75 miles southwest of Saigon; I directed a Quaker humanitarian program for three years in Quang Ngai province.

Over the next six years, we continued our meetings; Sam repeated these words as if the words justified the missed opportunity. "We were just high school college-age kids, remember? We weren't ready to marry. What tragic timing." Our relationship remains, for both of us, as one of the ironic missed events of our lives.

Our Vietnam experiences were starkly different. During one of our soul-to-soul talks, I shared with Sam that while working at the Quaker hospital, where all injured civilians were welcome, I had developed a deep friendship with a former patient who had her legs blown off by a mine. She was probably a Viet Cong sympathizer. Sam mentioned that he served with a guy, Jerry White, who had fallen in love with a local Vietnamese girl who was known to be a Viet Cong agent. I challenged Sam. That situation was impossible. I saw for myself how the military kept themselves within a guarded compound. The US military saw Vietnamese women as hootch and laundry cleaners or prostitutes. There was no mixing of US soldiers and Viet Cong female agents. "No, it's true, Jane. Jerry brought this Vietnamese woman to the reunions with my war buddies years after we all returned from Vietnam." Because I remained in disbelief, Sam connected Jerry and me. I became captivated by Jerry's story.

How did these two meet? Of course, there was a division between the US soldiers and the local population. Still, a few Vietnamese were allowed onto the base where Sam and Jerry were stationed, including some women who sold cokes to the US soldiers. The first time Jerry saw "Barbara," he was smitten. She was pure—a delicate young girl with penetrating eyes, dark hair, and an animated personality. A superior officer pointed to her and explained to Jerry that they believed Barbara was a VC agent, but they'd never been able to prove it and arrest her. Indeed, the Vietnamese woman who used the alias "Barbara" was, in fact, observing and gathering information. At first Barbara was a friend to Jerry, saying hello as they crossed paths. Occasionally Barbara suggested that Jerry take a different route when out on patrol than he had planned, which Jerry began to understand was her way of keeping him safe from locations where she knew booby traps had been planted.

Then, in a horrific incident, one of Jerry's men was killed, and Barbara was seriously injured by a VC detonated mine. (The VC hadn't realized Barbara was with the group of soldiers when they detonated the mine.) Jerry carried her to the medivac helicopter, which took Barbara to a local hospital. When she looked at Jerry, Jerry knew she was looking into his soul for trust. She was also sending a message of affection. When Jerry learned Barbara was coming home from the hospital to die because her family couldn't continue to pay for her to remain in the hospital, Jerry paid $40 to cover the cost of one month's continued care in the hospital.

In a fortuitous assignment, Jerry was reassigned to another area where he could live in an apartment. He was shocked when Barbara arrived and came to live with him. They told everyone they had married since "good girls don't shack up" with GIs. Jerry and Barbra had three ideal months living together. When Jerry's tour of duty was over, he wanted Barbara to return to the States with him, but she couldn't leave her family for an unfamiliar country. Plus the US military had identified her as VC enemy already and she would never be granted a visa. Jerry returned to the US. When the war was over in Vietnam, Barbara was coerced by her family to marry a former ARVN soldier. She produced eight children before her husband died of a heart condition. She raised the children alone.

After Jerry returned to the US, he completed graduate school, held successful work positions, and survived a couple of unhappy marriages. He even had to fight for custody of his children from his first marriage. Granted custody, Jerry was a single father to his children. Jerry had never stopped loving Tuyet. Secretly, he would look at and caress the few pictures of Tuyet he had saved for 30 years.

In a life-altering decision, Jerry hired a guide who could act as an interpreter, and in 2001, went back to the area where Tuyet's family lived

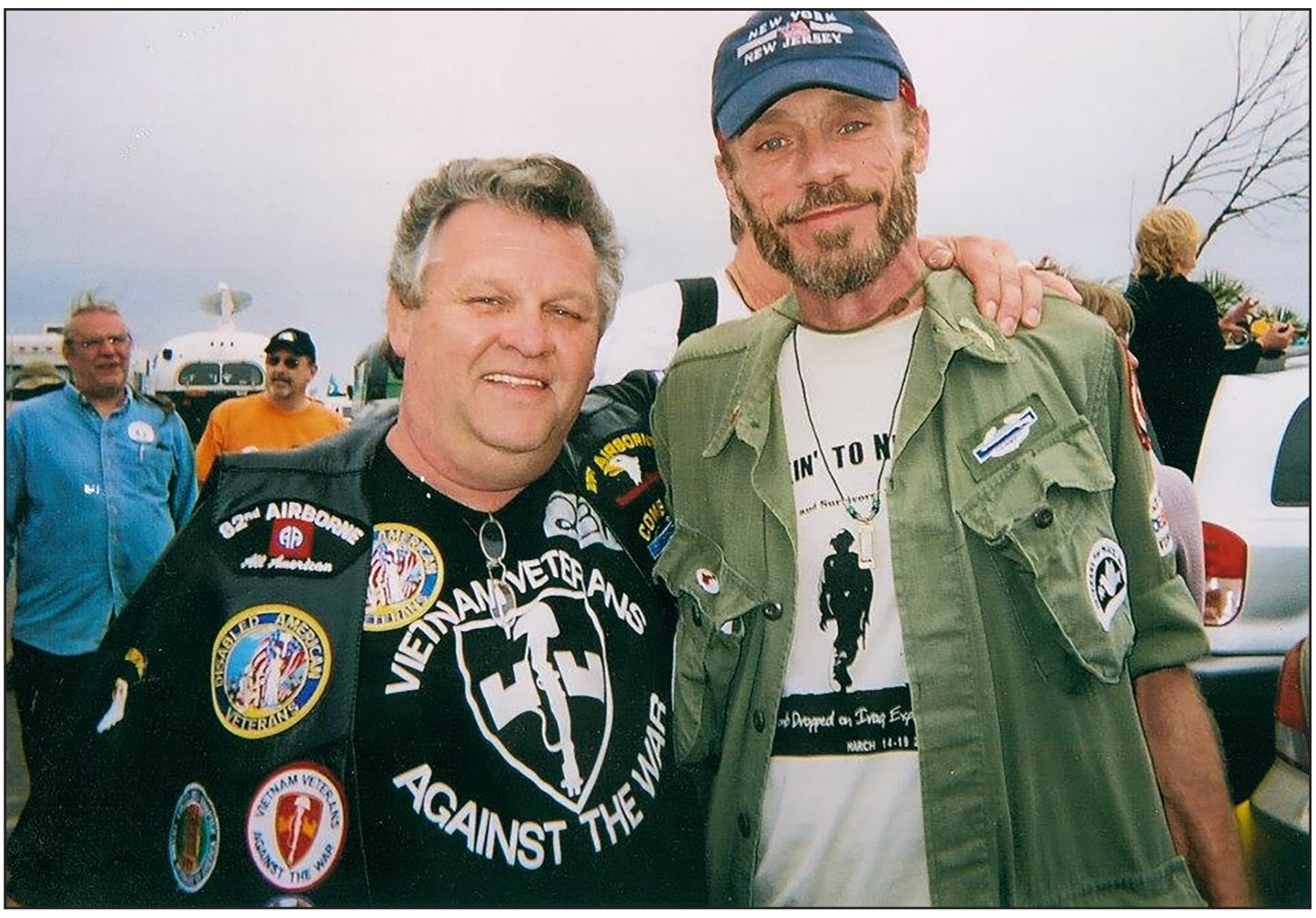
and miraculously found her. Over the next few years, Jerry returned to visit every year. Then, in 2004, Tuyet and Jerry flew to the US, where they were legally married. Jerry's children, now grown adults, embraced their new mother. Tuyet and Jerry settled into a "happy ever after" life in Texas. Every other year, they returned to Vietnam. In 2021, it was their turn to go to Vietnam. However, with COVID-19 raging, Jerry and Tuyet decided it might be better to stay in the US, based on the theory that if either of them got COVID-19, the hospitals in Texas might be superior to those in Vietnam.

At the end of March 2021, Tuyet felt suddenly sick. Jerry's son immediately drove her to the hospital. It was just a precautionary step. Unfortunately, Tuyet had contracted COVID-19 and quickly became seriously ill. She was moved into the ICU. No one was allowed to visit. Jerry was not able to even see or talk to her. He lamented, "I never got to hold her, tell her that I loved her, nor kiss her goodbye." Tuyet died on April 1, 2021. Jerry is still mourning and eager to join Tuyet—wherever she may be.

After hearing Jerry and Tuyet's story, I wanted the whole world to know about this remarkable love story between enemies, which Jerry had recorded in English. As the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War was approaching, I thought that it would be a sentimental story that should be shared with the Vietnamese, an example of how two "enemy" individuals and two nations have reconciled. I arranged for a Vietnamese contact to translate the story into Vietnamese and find a publisher. This Vietnamese woman worked on the translation for free; she didn't ask for any money. Jerry insisted that the translator and publisher would ask for a "bribe" at some point, but she didn't. Still, because the translation and editing process was onerous and time-consuming, Sam and I discussed sending some money to the translator as a token of appreciation for her effort. Sam didn't want Jerry to know because the translator had never asked for money. Sending some money wasn't a response to a request from her. The translator was working on the effort to publish Jerry's story because she believed in the lesson of Jerry's story. Sam was kind and sent me a small check. I added some money and wired it to the translator in Vietnam. The story of Jerry and "Barbara" is called *Romeo and Tuyet* and will be published in March 2025 for the 50th celebration of the end of the Vietnam war—the story of how two enemies married after holding love in their hearts for each other for 31 years.

Sam wanted to see the book *Romeo and Tuyet* in print, but he died in December 2024 from cancer caused by Agent Orange. Tuyet and Sam are gone. Their story lives on, and, as the Vietnamese say, they will be remembered until the last person who knew them has died.

Jane Barton Griffith was the director of humanitarian programs for the American Friends (Quaker) Service Committee from 1967-73 in Quang Ngai, Vietnam. Her memoir, Two Women, One War: An Unlikely Friendship During the Vietnam War, was released on March 8, 2025. It is available online and in independent bookstores. This memoir is the story of two women of opposites: race, religion, educational and economic backgrounds, and views of the war. Author Barton Griffith relates how they coped with fear during the war and found joy in discovering that they shared a common humanity and desire for peace and love. They have kept their friendship alive over the past fifty years and felt compelled to share stories of their rare friendship as they grew older.



Bill Perry and Dave Cline. Fallen Comrades.

Milwaukee Save the VA Rally

About 300 labor supporters, veterans, and Veterans Administration employees gathered for a rally March 7, 2025 at the VA Zablocki Medical Center in Milwaukee to show support for VA personnel and to protest the VA cuts being made by Trump and Musk. Speakers included VA employees, union leaders, and veterans. One speaker was a recently fired VA employee who had just received an exemplary job performance review and expressed his shock and hurt. Also speaking was US Representative Gwen Moore who said "these purges are a slap in the face to those who have sacrificed for our country."

Pat Kettenhofen.

Dave "Red" Kettenhofen.

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Remembering Joan Davis: 50-year Member of VVAW

VVAW

Joan S. Davis of Oak Park, Illinois, passed away peacefully at home with the views of her beautiful summer garden on August 23rd, 2024. Born on December 6th, 1949, to loving parents Beatrice (Brickman) and Paul Hammer in Eastchester, New York. Joan earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin Madison; she later attended the University of Illinois Chicago, where she received her master's degree in History. Joan was forever changed by her education at the University of Wisconsin and the anti-war activism of the time.

Joan moved to Chicago, where she met her husband, Bill Davis, a Vietnam Veteran and VVAW member. Together, they marched and protested along with other Vietnam Veterans Against the War and thousands of others through the streets of Chicago and nationwide. She continued to protest the war machine through the many American conflicts to follow, never wavering in her belief that justice and peace were worth fighting for. Joan and Bill's mutual passion for equity and social justice led them to put their roots down in Oak Park. In this progressive and open-minded community, they created their forever home, growing and shaping a loving family with two children, Joshua and Rebecca. Whether camping at the annual VVAW campout or attending the many protests, Memorial Days, and Veterans Day events, VVAW events were a family affair.

Most who knew and loved Joan would agree that she left her largest activism mark during her many years as a gifted and dedicated educator. She taught a pathbreaking seminar on the Vietnam War at York High School in Elmhurst, Illinois; Barry Romo often spoke at those seminars, and students were riveted, and their minds were changed. Many students recounted how special Joan's classes were in teaching critical thinking, justice, morality, and questioning authority. Teaching high school Social Studies at York High School in Elmhurst, Illinois, she was not just an educator but a force for critical thought and analysis, bringing multiple perspectives and underrepresented voices into her classroom.

Joan pioneered the first US History Seminar at York, introducing students to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, challenging them to rethink traditional narratives and engage deeply with history. She founded a high school chapter of Amnesty International to connect students to global human rights issues. She also created the advocacy club, REALITY, aimed at enlightening students about racism, welcoming diversity, and making the school a more inclusive space. Her efforts shaped the York community and empowered generations of students to become advocates for equity and justice.

Joan brought rigor and real debate to her classes, supporting students in learning about the past and helping them understand what it meant to engage with the present and have hope for the future. In her classes, she cared about students as whole human beings. Through field trips to art and history museums, bringing in guest speakers, and courageously discussing more recent events, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, she was able to help thousands of young people find their confidence, opinions, and voices over the years. Joan also helped plan an anti-war teach-in during this time, ensuring that her students and colleagues stayed engaged for peace.

Joan's influence on her students didn't end with graduation. Many have gone on to careers and activism that make the world a better place. Some teachers may wonder about their impact, but Joan didn't have to. Countless students returned over the years to express gratitude, and many forged enduring friendships with her, which were rooted in deeply shared values and respect. Her former students are forever grateful for having Joan as their history teacher.

Beyond the classroom, Joan was a fierce negotiator and a devoted union activist. She served as Vice President and co-President of the Elmhurst Teachers' Council, consistently standing up for the rights of others even when it did not benefit her personally. Joan was known for her unwavering dedication to fairness, always putting the greater good ahead of her own interests. Even after retirement, Joan supported current teachers navigating the right-wing backlash infecting our schools today. She spoke at school board meetings and organized support for teachers under attack, demonstrating her ongoing commitment to justice, education, and the importance of learning a full and comprehensive history.

As much as Joan embraced her fighting spirit, she will also greatly

Joan Davis at Celebration of Barry Romo's life, Chicago, May 27, 2024.

be remembered as a loving mother and Nana to little William. She was a great lover of life, and her love of life was infectious, even in the face of great loss. On any given sunny afternoon, you could find her meditating among her flowers in her beautiful garden, releasing butterflies with her grandson, creating exceptional pottery pieces and art, and always dancing and humming along to music. She was a loving and loyal friend, creating a multi-generational quilt of friendships that she maintained throughout her life. Joan loved storytelling in all forms and instilled that love into her family and friends. She was a free spirit that flowed beautifully through the world and somehow remained grounded.

The tragic losses of her son Josh at the age of 18 and soon after her husband Bill were deeply dark times in her family. But indomitable Joan, rather than retreating, strengthened the community around her. On her first Christmas without Josh, she invited all of his and her friends to make ornaments and decorate the tree at her house. The ornaments contained special messages dedicated to Josh. It was a time of storytelling, laughter, and love shared. Not only did she gain strength from that special day, but she also showed that personal loss can be overcome. Joan continued strengthening Josh's community of friends, emphasizing how we all need one another. She also established the Josh Davis Memorial Scholarship to celebrate his love and dedication to nurturing and preserving the environment.

Joan will be remembered as a loving mother and Nana, a tireless and compelling advocate for freedom and peace with justice, and a political activist for anti-war, union, labor, women's and civil rights, and many other progressive causes.

She most recently spoke at the VVAW Memorial Day event near the Chicago River in 2024, remembering Barry Romo.

Prescient in the times we face today, Joan said in that speech in 2024: "I'm a 50-year member of VVAW… We have had joy and fun…times to share love and friendship. [We need] to create the kind of world we want to live in—that we want our children to live in—that we want our grandchildren to live in. We need to deal with the big issues that really matter. We need to take care of one another. We need to end the violence we see around us. We need to end the endless wars."

Joan Davis at VVAW Veterans Day event, Chicago, November 11, 2001.

On Teaching High School Students About the Vietnam War

JOAN DAVIS

Reprinted from
The Veteran, Spring 1998.

One of my students from last year ran up to me in the hall and asked excitedly, "Ms. Davis, did you see the story about Hugh Thompson in the newspaper?" This made my day. Not only did he remember our unit on Vietnam and the mock trial we did about My Lai, but he was excited to see the recognition, although belated, that a real Vietnam veteran hero deserved. Learning about Vietnam made a difference to him and his understanding of our country's history.

I have taught United States history for ten years in a Chicago suburban high school. Though the community is a predominantly white, conservative town, I have been fortunate to work in a progressive social studies department that has given me great freedom to teach what I feel is important using my preferred method of instruction. As a Sixties activist and veteran of the anti-war movement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I clearly believed when I started teaching that Vietnam must be taught thoroughly and that certain lessons from that war must be shared with my students. I tell this to my students at the beginning of the unit so they understand my perspective from the start. Social studies teachers—and all teachers—should share their beliefs with their students and not pretend to be teaching some supposedly "objective" history. All teachers have a point of view. Our textbooks and other resources we choose to incorporate in our courses are not ideologically neutral. On the other hand, we should not be afraid to expose our students to alternative views as they struggle to develop their understanding of history.

Over the past ten years, certain aspects of teaching about Vietnam have changed, while others have remained the same. Students are still extremely interested in learning about Vietnam. This is especially helpful since many students consider required US history one of their worst courses, having suffered through watered-down US history classes in the earlier grades. Students still come into the class with a lack of information or a great deal of misinformation concerning Vietnam. Students still have relatives who were involved in some way with Vietnam. However, after ten years it is starting to become ancient history to students who have a very short historical perspective. What has changed is that students no longer come in with a strong anti-communist bias. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, students today have only a vague understanding of the Cold War ideology that permeated the interpretation of history. This makes teaching the war somewhat easier because there are fewer preconceptions of what this conflict was about.

Teaching Vietnam needs to be put in a broader perspective, and I feel that the topical approach to history that I use helps. Students have been exposed to US history in the earlier grades, and rather than creating a course that seems to repeat what they already have been taught, I use a thematic approach. Through earlier units, students have already been exposed to the concept that much of what is good about this country has come from people assembling to demand their fair share of the so-called American Dream. Through a study of Native American issues, the labor movement, and the civil rights movement, students understand that, by the 1960s, people were demanding that their government fulfill its mission of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for all its people. They are somewhat aware that during this tumultuous time, the Vietnam conflict broke out and made people fight even harder.

I find that a minimum of three weeks is needed to teach Vietnam in any depth. Teachers may not have the freedom to spend this much time on Vietnam, but, based on my experience, I think there is far more freedom than many teachers assume—especially new teachers. Generally, there is an assigned textbook and a general outline of content, but within the four walls of a classroom, very few eyes are watching what you do. If students are learning and positive feedback is being received, teachers must take the risk of teaching what needs to be taught, and clearly, that is Vietnam. If teachers look critically at what is taught in the course of the year, most will be able to find areas where material can be omitted. Within the context of Vietnam, many lessons can be incorporated that address broader US history issues. I strongly feel that less than three weeks can give students a taste of the conflict, but one which will not remain with them for very long.

What can be covered in just three weeks? There are thousands of resources to use in teaching Vietnam. If a teacher has little study of this period, I recommend Marilyn Young's *The Vietnam Wars*. Although fairly dense, it is extremely readable and full of material that could be excerpted for the classroom. The chapter on Vietnam in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is an excellent summary to start with to get an overall perspective (and highly praised in the very popular movie *Good Will Hunting*). Clearly, the better-educated the teacher, the better the instruction will be. The assigned textbook may or may not be helpful. We recently adopted *The American Odyssey* (by Gary Nash), and its chapters on Vietnam are excellent.

Apart from the necessary written information, Vietnam must come alive to the students. This can be done using excerpts from the PBS multi-volume documentary, *The Vietnam War*. Joe McDonald's (of Country Joe and the Fish) *The Vietnam Experience* is a 30-minute music video that is a great opener to the unit, combining footage of the conflict here and abroad with powerful music. *The War at Home* documents the anti-war movement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison while incorporating it within a broader perspective. Feature films are effective, but it is often difficult to decide which to use. I have found that *Platoon* works well in the classroom and raises many important questions students need to discuss. Outside assignments such as book reports or movie reviews can also increase information without taking time from class.

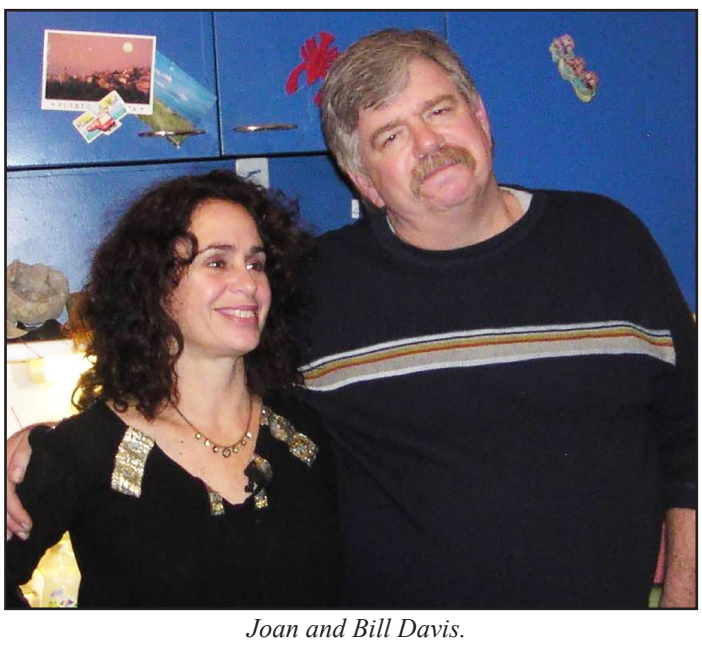
I also involve students in a mock trial of My Lai to determine the guilt or innocence of Lieutenant Calley. This activity culminates with viewing the documentary *Remember My Lai*. As mentioned, when Hugh Thompson was recently awarded the Soldier's Medal, several of my former students were excited and knew why he deserved it. Students can also be encouraged to raise money for the My Lai Peace Park and to realize that activism is still very much needed today. If a Vietnamese community is nearby, ties with that community could be developed.

The most important teaching tools have been the personal accounts of veterans and activists who have come to school and shared their stories. I have worked with several teachers to make a full-day in-school field trip (we call it a "teach-in") in which we brought in speakers to tell their stories. Since I am a member of VVAW, I am fortunate to have personal contacts with excellent speakers but don't be afraid to access your students' resources. Often, fathers or other relatives are willing to come in, and seldom do they paint an untrue picture of the conflict. Of course, there are always people with their own agendas, but those people are becoming fewer and fewer. People might not have a developed political perspective, but if their stories are honest, they are always very powerful. Including interview assignments is another way to encourage the sharing of stories. I invariably have students who did not know their fathers were in Vietnam until they asked. With distance from the conflict, some are now ready to share their experiences with their children.

If a variety of resources are used, teaching about Vietnam will be exciting to your students. There is one problem to be aware of, especially when young people today are so cynical about the world and especially about our government. As they learn about the dishonesty of the US government in developing its aggression against Vietnam and its dishonorable dealings with protesters and veterans, this cynicism can be increased. This is not what we, as social studies teachers, want to happen. Emphasis must be placed on the courageous actions of the Vietnamese people and those at home who protested the unfair policies. This long and determined struggle helped change the course of history. This emphasis will hopefully serve to combat cynicism and increase students' desire to be part of changing what is still wrong with this country's uneven record in affording a just and fair society to all. Teaching about Vietnam will hopefully empower students to realize they can do something useful. They may rethink their career choices and/or link up with other young people to work around issues in their community. While not all students will take up the call, none will if there is no attempt to teach them what they can do to make a difference.

JOAN DAVIS WAS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER AND MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.

Joan and Becky Davis, Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 1982.



Joan and Bill Davis.

Tribute to Jim Fallon

Walt Nygard

Jim Fallon died in the early hours of the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Combat Paper and Frontline Paper veterans, families, and friends lost a best friend. His smile and easy banter were a fixture of every Sunday workshop and many a Frontline affair, in the studio or on the road.

Jim brought a lifetime of colorful experience: Vietnam Combat Medic, jazz drummer and club owner, bartender, union rep in New York and California, VA case officer, and veteran anti-war activist. He's traveled the world and shared the adventure with his wife of 47 years, Peg Fallon.

An Agent Orange casualty from the War, bone cancer left him with a titanium right arm. Though it ended his drumming, Jim worked with veterans his whole life, and through knowing me and friends like Frank Wagner and Jan Barry, Jim discovered Combat Paper, a deep and revelatory experience we all shared. Combat Paper changed our lives.

Though a disabled veteran, Jim saw us cut lino blocks and print our first images, telling our stories with our art. And Jim Fallon was a man with a treasure trove of stories. With his rebuilt arm and a little help from his friends, he began producing work sublime in feeling, for the War he knew, for the musicians he loved, for the New York—New Jersey home he knew so well, and for the wonders of the natural world.

And he began to paint. He covered sheets of the paper we love with passionate colors. And regardless of the subject, his work emanates a joy of life that he would not see extinguished, even as we grieve his loss.

I met Jim Fallon almost twenty years ago. In Veterans For Peace, we marched together in New York and New Jersey, Washington, DC, Portland, Oregon, Portland, Maine, and places I forget.

I thought Jim was the coolest guy I knew. Fair winds and following seas, my Friend...

Walt Nygard is studio manager and lead instructor of Frontline Paper and a close friend of Jim.

Walt, Jim, and Ron

Division of Labor

Back in the war, I lived for 13 months
on canned C-rats. Messhall food,
even when you could get it, always
left you with Ho Chi Minh's revenge.

Canned stuff was always a better bet.
I learned to work miracles with ham
& mothers, SeaBee scallions, a little
Louisiana Red Rooster Hot Sauce.

I could cut those little canned loaves
of bread into eight thin slices, make
four sandwiches with the little cans
of pork steak, ham steak, or beef steak.

I was never much of a cook;
my specialty: camper's delight;
ground beef, frozen corn, baked beans
tossed into a saucepan and heated,

though I also managed okay with eggs
and a frying pan. I never starved
when I lived on my own, though I
often relied on the kindness of friends

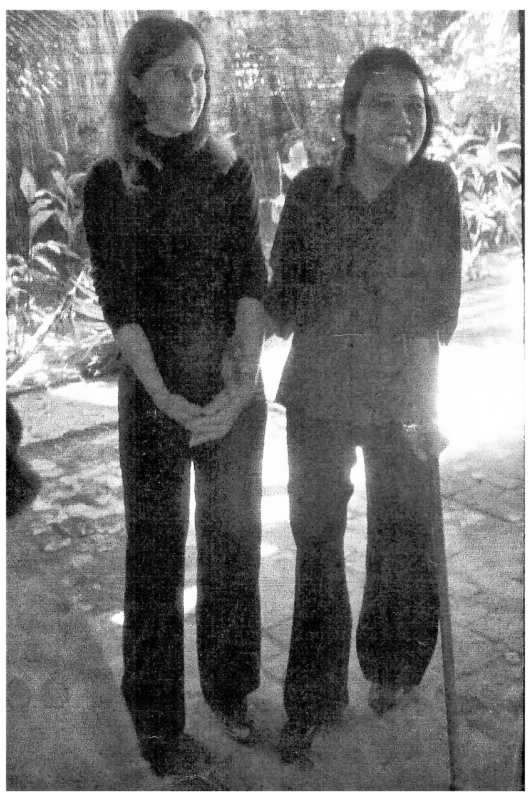
who would ask me to dinner now
and then, feeling sorry for me.
The woman I married tired quickly
of camper's delight and fried eggs

and learned, of necessity, how to cook.
She's long since become pretty good
in the kitchen, and in forty-four years
I've washed a lot of dishes.

—W. D. Ehrhart

Two Women, One War: An Unlikely Friendship During the Vietnam War

By Jane Barton Griffith



A story of the insanity of war, the human capacity for resilience, and the power of hope and strength of friendship between two women who were considered enemies by their government.

Order online at:
www.barnsandnoble.com
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Softcover $17.95 Hardcover $26.95
Ebook $7.99

Author Jane Barton Griffith lived in "Pinkville" Quang Ngai province while she directed a Quaker hospital that provided artificial limbs to war-injured Vietnamese civilians from 1970-73

Albert Penta's Navy Service Saga

Albert Penta

I joined the US Navy in 1958, right out of high school. Eisenhower was in the middle of his second term. I was almost 18. I re-enlisted and did five years aboard ship. In 1964, I was selected for a special program where I would attend four years of college and become a Naval officer. I drove across the country and arrived in Seattle as a UW freshman at age 24. It was 1964, the summer of Civil Rights in the South and the autumn of Free Speech at Berkeley. It was also in August of that year that the "Tonkin Gulf Incident" supposedly took place. It was later shown to be "fake news," but it did provide the excuse for the USA to go full bore in its war on Vietnam. I drifted along at UW but paid close attention to the war news and what was starting to happen on campus.

As the war news became more horrific, and as student demonstrations grew in early 1967, I joined in the Quaker's Silent Vigil for Peace in Vietnam. Late in 1967, I knew I couldn't remain on the USN path. I filed in September 1967 as a Conscientious Objector. I was removed from classes and given a makeshift job while my CO file was sent back to USN Washington, DC.

In December 1967, I was ordered to a ship at Pearl Harbor, arriving a week before Xmas. In January 1968, my CO file came back as "Disapproved" ("Too old" at 27 and "not having strongly-held religious beliefs"). We were told the ship would sail to "Vietnam waters" the next Monday. On Saturday, I left the ship for the last time and caught a one-way flight back to Seattle, using an assumed name.

I was AWOL for over a month. I went to San Francisco and Berkeley to speak with people from the War Resisters League and the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors. They advised me to return to Seattle and "turn myself in," to have a better chance of remaining closer to home and family.

In February 1968, I turned myself in at Naval Station Pier 91. I'll never forget that morning: A crusty old WWII warrant officer was on duty. When I told him my story, he said, "Why I ought to throw you right in the Brig, but I don't want you to contaminate the younger enlisted men!" So, I went into Solitary—a very plush Solitary: an unused old Officers' Quarters, a nice room with a bed and a bookshelf full of books, and a private bathroom with a shower, sink, and toilet. I was there for a month awaiting special Court-Martial. That happened in early April 1968: I was found guilty of AWOL and missing ship's movement, busted in rank, and given a fine… But, thanks to my Quaker lawyer, Bill Hansen—a wonderful man—the Court-Martial Board said that I seemed to be a sincere CO and I should re-apply for CO status. Unfortunately, the C.M. Board couldn't grant that, and I would need to wait 2 or 3 months for the decision back in Washington, DC. I was free to go home to my family at night and would be given a temporary day job while waiting.

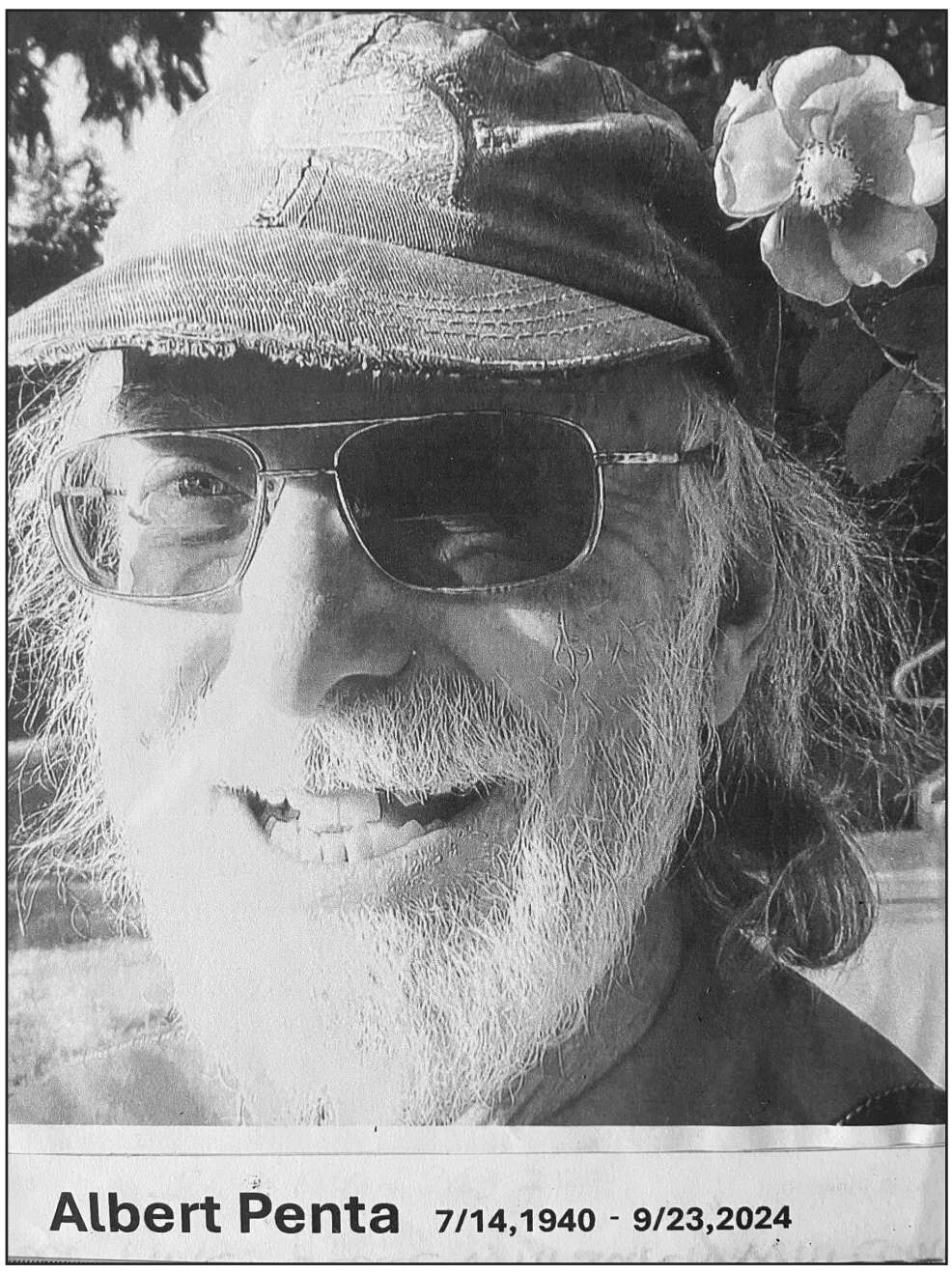
It was April 4th, 1968, my son's 4th birthday, and MLK Jr. was assassinated in Memphis.

The next day, I reported to the same crusty old warrant officer for my job assignment: He was LIVID! "I can't believe they let you off! I would have sent you to Leavenworth for life! I'm going to give you the lowest, most demeaning job on the base. (I was visualizing scrubbing toilets.) I'm making you a Bicycle Messenger Boy."

As a lifelong bicyclist, I smiled inwardly. This was like Br'er Rabbit getting thrown back into the brier patch. I got my bike and soon traveled all over the Pier 91 Navy Base. In the process, I met many of the ne'er-do-wells who were also being held on the base: dope-smokers, homosexuals, fighters, and other "trouble-makers." We formed an ad-hoc peace group on the base, mostly plastering anti-war stickers everywhere.

The CO application process went very slowly. I remained a Bicycle Messenger Boy for almost a full year.

Finally, the CO application came back "DENIED," but it essentially said, "Since you don't want to be in the Navy, we don't want you anyway." I was given an Honorable Discharge effective April 1969.



I was very fortunate. Many younger guys in similar situations were given Undesirable or Bad Conduct discharges. I returned to the UW on the VA and got my BA in 1970.

I got a "temporary" job at the Post Office—and retired in 1999.

As a civilian, I was active in the anti-war movement and the anti-nuclear weapons movement of the 1970s. I remain a life-long peace activist.

Albert Penta
July 14, 1940-September 23, 2024

Albert J. Penta was born in 1940 to an Irish mother and Italian father in Revere,Massachusetts. He joined the Navy the summer after high school graduation in 1958. After his Navy saga was finally over, he settled in Snohomish County in the 70s with his family, homesteading at the Penta Peace Farm. Al was a founder/co-founder of a handful of peace councils in Snohomish County in the 70s through the 2000s. He was also a member/supporter of many peace and progressive organizations. He dedicated his life to peace and justice. He was going to demos and marches for Palestine until he passed away from Merkel Cell Carcinoma (triggered from a fall), a rare but aggressive cancer. Al had the most positive energy, and throughout his life he had many enduring friendships. —by Kim Loftness, his life partner

Mitch Kuhn - Presente!

Mitch Kuhn, the artist who created VVAW's *Honor The Warrior, Not The War* banner which was brought to the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial Wall, has died. He was a highly respected button maker and collector who was always available to lend VVAW an artistic hand when called upon. "Uncle Mitchie's Kuhn tales" were entertaining and informative, and he will be missed greatly. Rest in power.

Mitch Kuhn.

Mitch Kuhn, Joel Greenberg, Jack McCloskey, and Eric Schwartz.

The Healing Power of the Pen

John Brennan

Greg Kleven, a Vietnam War veteran and an English language teacher in Ho Chi Minh City, died there on December 3rd, 2024. Greg was the first American and Vietnam veteran allowed to live and work in Vietnam after the war. Shortly before his death, his autobiography, "My War and Peace in Vietnam", was completed. Let's pray that his personal story finds a publisher. Otherwise, history will be cheated. Below is my memory of Greg, before and after the war.

Ten months into Greg's Vietnam tour of duty in 1967, he was medevaced to the USA and a Naval hospital on the West Coast near his home. He had miraculously survived a near-fatal combat wound during a behind-the-lines recon patrol near the vicinity of the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail. Fast-forward to present-day Ho Chi Minh City, and there on the front lines of a new frontier is a fully recuperated Greg, clear-eyed as never before, one of the best unknown writers of his generation as never before.

My friend Greg is an English teacher in Vietnam and an old pen pal of mine. He and I grew up together in California, and as early as the first grade, Greg exhibited skills that made him destined for the communication business. On receiving a medical discharge and pondering its implications on a future career, Greg remarked, "Like we said in our letters, there's no real civilian counterpart to a combat Recon Marine." What Greg failed to recognize, despite my many appeals, was his natural talent for writing. He possessed an instinctive skill for intelligent composition. He could turn a phrase with just about the same measure of agility and flair as when he was a kid turning double plays on the ballfields of Oakland. Greg was a highly employable artist, but regrettably, the ravages of war had silenced the muse.

I saw him periodically over the next two decades, staying in touch informally through picture postcards and the local grapevine. College, careers, marriage, kids, and moves consumed our postwar years, with sports thrown in to round out the main topics of conversation whenever we got together. The war had definitely changed him, but to what extent was anybody's guess. The little that I knew was that the subject of Vietnam, the contents of his letters, and the mention of any veteran organization were tactfully avoided. I didn't pry.

And then, from out of the blue, came news that was so off-the-wall that it literally stopped me in my tracks. Greg had gone back to Vietnam! For fear of ridicule and the fact it was illegal, Greg had quietly and successfully slipped back into Vietnam on a tourist visa for a two-week visit. Then the other shoe landed. I subsequently learned from Greg that the controversial toxin Agent Orange had been medically determined to be the probable cause in the recent death of his premature infant daughter and that he'd been personally battling severe nightmares and flashbacks of the war for several years. Things had radically come to a head for Greg.

As it turned out, going to Vietnam in 1988 was just what the doctor ordered. Greg's self-prescribed eight-thousand-mile journey virtually saved his life. He told me this himself. It's ironic to think that twenty-one years earlier, with his life in the balance, the country of Vietnam was deemed ill-suited to handle Greg's medical emergency. Yet, two decades later, it represented the perfect harbor site for this former Recon Marine.

What became a journey of emotional healing also set into motion a personal reconciliation campaign. In short order, Greg traveled to Washington, DC, with his family to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Three-Man Statue nearby. He came away from that experience with deep, probing questions: It was time to focus on the Nam issue, but how?

After several brainstorming sessions between Greg and me, the genesis for *Vietnam Echos* (without the 'e') was developed. We decided to self-publish an alternative veteran's newsletter with the objective of "providing information on the continuing Vietnam experience." It would be distributed free to individuals and organizations dealing with the legacy of the war.

We had, you might say, the perfect ingredients for balanced journalism. Greg was a veteran "grunt" (infantry) and I was a veteran "remf" (rear echelon) of the same war. It made for a formidable combination without the usual drawbacks commonly associated with newly formed partnerships. Although I had followed Greg to Vietnam as an Army clerk, his wartime experiences never once turned into combat chauvinism in a way that jeopardized our friendship. It was more than a mere collaboration for convenience. Its strength lay in it being a collaboration of the heart.

John Brennan and Greg Kleven at Tan Son Nhut airport in 1992.

Almost immediately, we hit pay dirt. Greg's first cover story, *What Was It Like In Vietnam*, was reprinted nationally in *Stars and Stripes*, the nation's oldest veteran's newspaper. It felt like hitting a home run at our first swing at bat. It was to be a good omen. Two years later, we'd hit a grand slam when *The Saigon Times* in Ho Chi Minh City reprinted a subsequent cover story of Greg's titled *Goofing Off In Hue*. It was obvious that we were on the right track.

Greg's body of work during this time had reached a celebrated maturity. The world was finally getting to sample what I had been privy to for many fortunate pen pal years. Most importantly, Greg himself had found contentment and a renewed vitality in life. It was infectious, too. With Greg as my tour guide, we traveled to Vietnam together in 1992. I came away acknowledging Greg's credo that "people should now be able to think of Vietnam as a country, not a war."

To me, this one person has done more than anyone I know to help ease the pain of reconciliation between two former enemy nations. He has helped open doors for those to follow and built bridges of trust where none existed before. For Greg, it was about going full circle, which he best summarized in the final issue of *Vietnam Echos*: "Something tells me I'm coming home to myself; I'm finally coming home."

Greg Kleven in Vietnam, 1967.

John Brennan is a Vietnam vet 1970-71, author of eight Vietnam War Army helicopter books with 1,000+ nose art pics.

For Aged Vets and Non-vets Alike Who are Treading Near the Edge

Hey Merlin. Wait up!
You charged ahead there,
moving off to a place
I haven't seen yet.

I had hoped
we could be there together,
and we will,
but just not now.

Wait for me.

—Woody Powell, Korea

From Bullets to Books

William L. Richter (reviewer)

The Amazing Adventures of Captain Embers & Chief Zogleman Whop! Whop! Whop!
by Ken Embers
(self-published, 2023)

I enjoy reading and reviewing books by local authors, whether I happen to know them or not.

The books often provide new perspectives on shared experiences, and it is valuable for people in our community to read about the lives and creativity of our neighbors. Manhattanite Ken Embers recently published a book with a lengthy but descriptive title: *The Amazing Adventures of Captain Embers & Chief Zogleman Whop! Whop! Whop!* I have known Ken Embers for perhaps three decades and have been aware of some of his charitable work in Vietnam years after his military service there in the sixties. I am grateful for his sharing this memoir of that service.

As the book's title indicates, Embers was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. The "Whop! Whop! Whop!" in the title is the sound of helicopter rotor blades. "Chief Zogleman" was fellow Kansan Mike Zogleman from Burns (near El Dorado), who was in Embers' unit in Vietnam. The Vietnam experiences occupy only about the first third of the book. The second third relates Embers' life after Vietnam: service as an instructor pilot stateside; study in France; graduate school at Kansas State University; teaching "baker's math" and English as a Second Language at the American Institute of Baking in Manhattan; returning to Vietnam with other veterans on a project to establish libraries there.

The remainder of the book draws on reminiscences of other veterans, mostly those with whom Embers served, and of photographs. These reflections on their lives before, during, and after Vietnam greatly complement Embers' account. Collectively, they provide a picture of a small slice of a generation of young Americans who served and returned and can now reflect on those experiences.

Chapter ten relates how Embers and some fellow veterans became involved in the Library of Vietnam Project. "One day in 2010," he writes, Mike Meyer walked into my office. He represented the Kansas Agricultural Hall of Fame and wanted to partner with AIB." (P. 83) Once they realized they had both been in Vietnam with helicopter units, Meyer put Embers in touch with another veteran who had built a school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Soon thereafter, Embers and Zogleman made their first trip back to Vietnam in forty years. They and others undertook to build a library/learning center in Bong Son, where they had been stationed. Embers has "been back every year since, except during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020-2022." (p. 91) He covers a lot in this short (10 pp.) chapter, but I would have enjoyed reading more about this later phase of the veterans' lives and work in Vietnam.

Some Mercury readers might be interested in a related matter that is not treated at all in this book. Three or four years ago, Ken Embers contacted former Mayor (and present Kansas Representative) Mike Dodson. Embers' friend Mike Meyer distributes books and other materials to charities and wondered whether Manhattan might be interested in receiving more than 7,000 new books.

As a Rotarian, Dodson took the question to the Manhattan Rotary Club. The club had just received a grant to support early childhood education and literacy in a six-county region and readily agreed to receive and distribute the books. That book-distribution program has evolved into a much broader operation in the past year. The Community Cares Chest, co-sponsored by the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation, Konza United Way, and other partners, distributes a wide range of goods free of charge to area non-profit organizations. Ken Embers and his fellow vets have had a significant positive impact not only on Bong Son, Vietnam but also on Manhattan, Kansas!

This book is available in the Manhattan public library. I immensely enjoyed reading it and think others will, too, especially anyone old enough to remember the Vietnam War.

William L. Richter is the KSU Political Science department head, Director of the K-State South Asia Center and founding director of the Office of International Programs.

The Amazing Adventures of Captain Embers

Phil Marshall (reviewer)

The Amazing Adventures of Captain Embers & Chief Zogleman Whop! Whop! Whop!
by Ken Embers
(self-published, 2023)

Ken Ember's first self-published book gives us one more look at a pilot's past, present, and future. Of course, his time as a Gun Platoon Leader, some memorable missions in the past, and other amazing adventures (misadventures?) in the 61st Assault Helicopter Company are documented. But (then) Captain Embers also documents his magnanimous (my word) efforts towards the Vietnamese people today. With several trips back to Vietnam in the present, he discusses his efforts, along with other Veterans, to build Libraries in Vietnam and especially his efforts to teach English as a second language to Vietnamese children.

It was not a long read, and I had no trouble finishing the book in just a few sittings; Ken kept my interest, which was a key requirement for judging a book. I especially enjoyed Ken's humor and keen insight into how the "system" worked in Vietnam. For example, "Promotion came fast in Vietnam. Just stay alive!" And then there is the photo caption, "A very hairy, scary mission!" More than once, my wife caught me laughing out loud at some of Ken's humor.

The Amazing Adventures… is not so much about "War Stories" as it is a book about what we can do for the Vietnamese people now. He is still very much involved in the present and what we can do for the survivors and their families of that terrible time. As for the future? Ken ain't done yet! Via Zoom, he still teaches English to Vietnamese students. So nice to know that even in our 70s and 80s, we are still trying to do something good for the people of Vietnam.

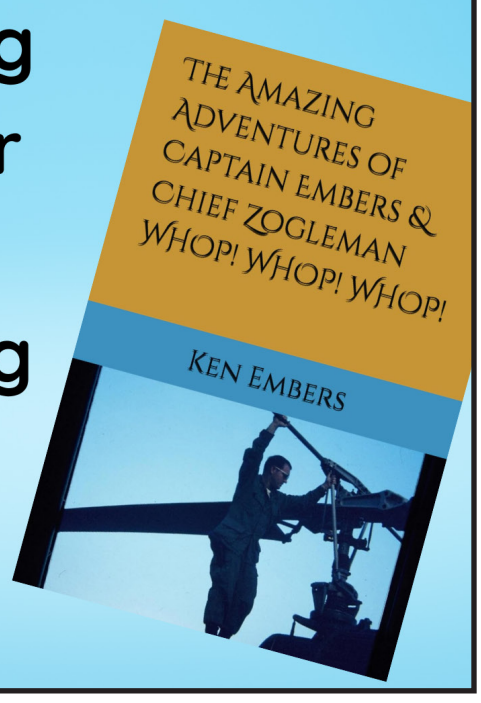
Phil Marshall is a life member and was president of the VHPA in 1994. He flew dustoff in 1969 in Northern I Corps and he is also a life member of American Huey 369. He has authored over 25 books to include 19 books documenting the rescue missions that we all flew in Vietnam.

From Bullets to Books

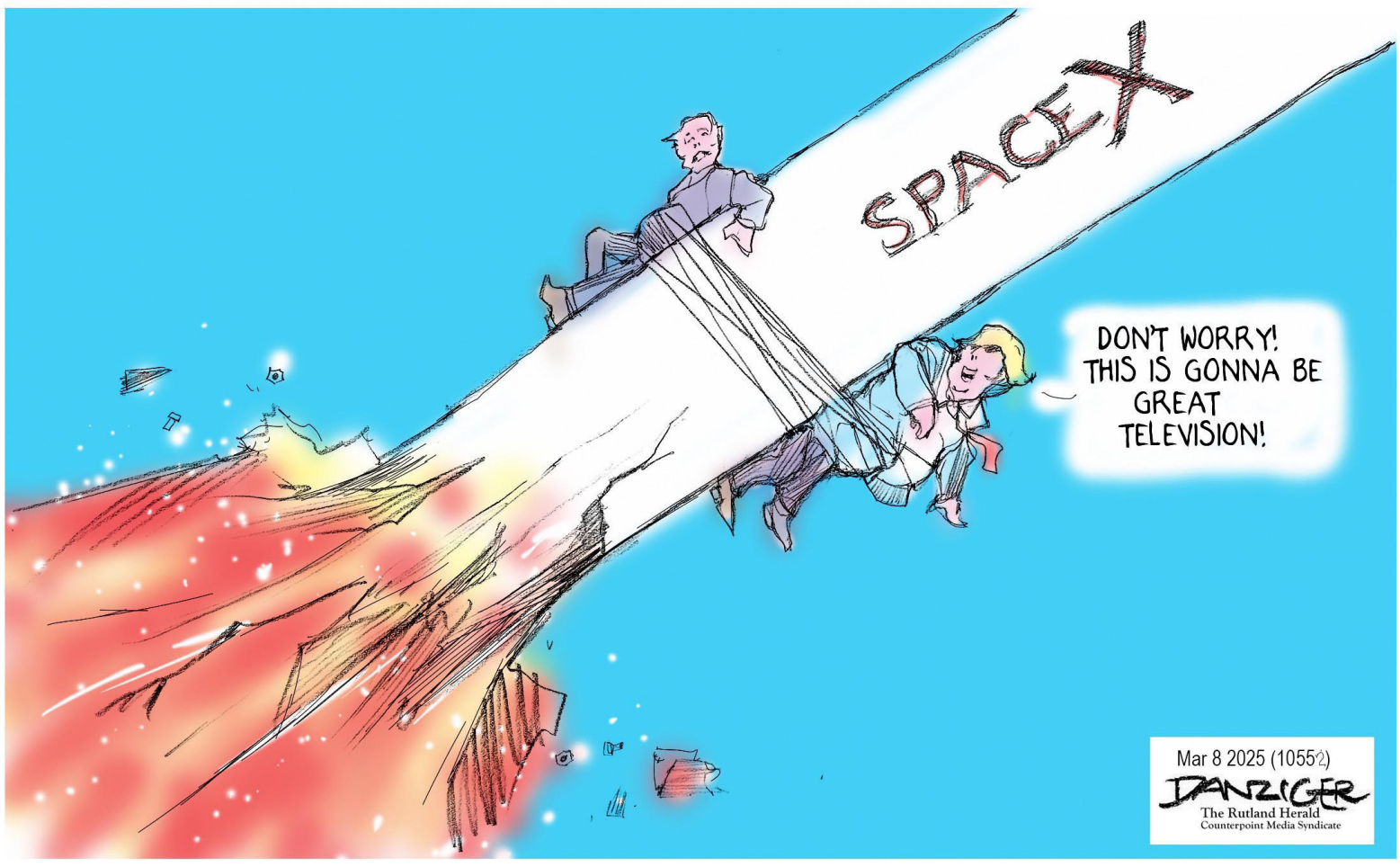
An amazing story of repair from a combat helicopter gunship platoon leader who returned to Vietnam to build a library learning center at Bong Son, near LZ English.

Learn more and get your copy at LuckyStarLibrary.com

Helping Rather than Hurting



Mr. Musk's SpaceX Company Blows Up Two Rockets in a Row.



Almost Home

Marc Levy

Patrol. Jungle. Ambush. Monsoon. Mortars and rockets, a base overrun. The teeming rain and blistering heat. I'd seen my share as a grunt medic in 1970. A year later, at Tan Son Nhut airport, I waited on the tarmac with dozens of weary grunts in weathered fatigues and boonie hats, clean-cut REMFS in khakis and shined boots, last seen on the flight to Vietnam. Sitting on our duffle bags or standing idly about, we chatted and began to sweat as the sun came up. A local REMF came near. "Snow. Anyone need snow?" He was selling heroin, but I did not know it. After a time, we boarded an enormous commercial jet. We broke into cheers when it finally roared down the runway, nosed upward, and lifted into the air.

In that first hour, men talked excitedly, drank liquor from small glass bottles, ogled the good-looking round-eye stewardesses, and little by little settled into sleep. Hours, or was it years later, the captain's voice over the intercom, the mechanical snap of one hundred seat belts locked into place, the robotic whirr of landing wheels descending. Ears popped. Infinite minutes passed. Finally, the jet touched down, the enormous engines roared in reverse, the aircraft lurched to a halt, and each man stepped down the metal stairway into a cavernous hanger.

I couldn't help but look at the replacements standing off to one side. Clad in new fatigues and new boots, their duffle bags stuffed with new t-shirts, socks, and so forth, they gaped at us, the shocked-out grunts especially. "Will I look like that when I come home?" they must have wondered. I didn't think to ask, "Have I changed that much in a year?" As we marched past the awestruck men, the only sound to be heard was the thudding of our jungle boots on the cold cement floor.

We walked to a far-away exit, which led to a well-lit room, where we sat in chairs and filled out forms. We were glad to hand over our MPC. "You don't need it! You're home! Give it here!" said a smiling clerk. He proffered a plastic bucket as he ambled up and down the seated rows, men willingly emptying their GI pockets of the colorful scrip. How much did he collect? A hundred, two hundred dollars? Decades later, after reading a book by Cornelius Hawkridge (tip of the hat to John Ketwig), I realized the clerks were smuggling the MPC back to Vietnam to be exchanged on the black market for dollars, paying a cut to the marketeers, splitting the profits. Pulling that stunt a few times a day, they made good money.

Paperwork completed, in an airport bathroom I changed into my dress greens. With an Army voucher, I caught a flight to Newark, NJ. A taxi from Newark airport to my parent's house, about eight miles away, cost six bucks. What I remember most, what moved me, what I'll never forget—since my parents, tragic figures who would not send me a survival knife while I was in combat—"You might hurt yourself," they said—was the sight of my dog jumping up and down as I walked in the door. My beloved dog, the one true thing I missed in that bright green, red dust, rainy year away from home, jumping for joy at the sight of me.

Marc Levy served with Delta 1/7 Cav in Vietnam and Cambodia in 1970. His website is Medic in the Green Time. Email: silverspartan@gmail.com.

Spilling Red

Emily Sanner

What an amazing experience it was to be. A small-town girl in an ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) program described as CULP (Cultural Understanding and Language Program). Yes, the Army and their damn acronyms. I hardly learned the ones I needed to know, let alone them all, before I was even getting out.

But anyway, I was selected to be a Cadet in the CULP Program; my trip was to Mozambique. Mozambique is south of Tanzania, North of South Africa, West of Madagascar, and East of Zimbabwe and Zambia. We would travel there for three weeks, and the "mission" was to include a variety of social and military learning (training with their cadets in physical training and security programs), humanitarian opportunities (in which we did visit an orphanage, but sadly only once which felt very useless in the end), and cultural exchanges, in which we did work with various youth "English language" programs in the capital city.

I got quite sick for 3 days, to the point I had to sit everything out each day and couldn't even get myself out of bed. I rarely get sick, but this was something either from the food my body was not used to or the malaria medicine we were taking every day that was already set to give us nightmares and cold sweats regularly. I did mend eventually and we had a really incredible ceremony with the Mozambican Defense Force. An officer from their force led us cadets, in rank, into their sacred temple in Maputo, the capital city. A torch was lit, and praises and commitments called for the harmony and unity of both nations. I'm just a green camo pawn in this weird sim experience, but without knowing, thinking this must be cool. It is really a beautiful thing for two nations to come together in harmony, not fighting, just sharing space inside a temple and honoring beautiful principles together.

This is not taught to the Americans as the standard but as something that must be fought for. So then everything becomes a fight. Peace isn't just accepted in America; it must be earned and violently fought for and can only be claimed for a small and exclusive population. Peace is a mystery to so many people.

The day after the ceremony, we would travel by van and motorcycle escort a few towns over, towards the coast, to meet with the higher echelons of the Mozambican Defense Force. To this day, I don't know what the meetings were about or what was said, as they were all held in Portuguese, the native language of Mozambique, because of their colonization by Portugal until 1975. My leader also spoke Portuguese by pure luck. Hence, as an Army Reserve Captain, she translated between their general and our highest leader on the ground—a Major.

The eight other cadets and I piled into a giant white, 15-passenger van, motorcyclist escorts who were Mozambican police equivalents leading us in the front and following us in the rear, at least 2 in each direction. I already knew this commute would be like the others here so far: rough, fast, and unlike any joy ride you take here in America. The sirens blaring on the motorcycles, to alert pedestrians and villagers who were simply going about their day-to-day lives that we, the United States Army (Cadets, mind you) in all its glory, were coming through. That alone made me feel a little weird, but by that point in the trip, I had started getting used to it, not accepting it, just used to it. Desensitized in a way that is just as the Army tends to do.

During that commute to the Mozambican Defense Force Cadet Academy, where we would be teaching the Cadets English lessons and about the structure of our Army, even though it was very similar to theirs. I remember this trip feeling extra bumpy compared to others as if we were late and flying through the streets despite it being midday and everyone in the city of Maputo being out in the markets and streets. We were headed slightly outside of the city, and I remember the colorful tent canopies around us, the sun shining in a blue sky with maybe a few puffy clouds, each selling a different textile below; the children playing everywhere, and the small girl we ran over in the road. The blood spilled from her in the street as I stared for as long as I could as we drove away. We didn't stop. Why didn't we stop? My mouth agape, I turn to my Captain, an actual Army Captain, the young lady who spoke Portuguese and had led us college kids very well on this trip. We lock eyes. She shakes her head and looks down at her hands. I do the same. Nobody else in the van says anything.

Why didn't we stop? Because America assumes it is the greatest nation in the world, they're immune. Immune from being held responsible for their crimes against humanity. Immune from all accountability. They assert themselves wherever they please and wherever they need.

Another thing I remember from that trip is being in the Grand Plaza Hotel in Mozambique as a college kid and staring down from my balcony at huts that lacked running water, sewage, and electricity and families that lacked stable income and opportunities. As fun and "cultural" as the trip was supposed to be, it was truthfully overcome with guilt, shame, anxiety, and doubt. Doubt for my future in this sadistic organization that could just turn a blind eye to blood spilling from a little girl they had injured. But that precious little being who was probably learning to read was not a human to them, to the organization of the military, and by proxy, it had to be the same for the men and women who served in it. And that, my friends, was me.

It was a devastating wave of feelings to take in all at once while in a foreign country.

The following week, we traveled to a southern region in Mozambique called Nampula. I remember on the way down there in an even smaller van and a much bumpier road, but less populated, we were stopped by some armed militiamen. We were never sure where they were from or who they were a part of. They did end up letting us go after searching our van and ourselves outside of it. They did not take any of our belongings and let us continue after my Captain negotiated in Portuguese terms I could not understand. It was another scary encounter where I felt my whiteness an intrusion in a place I, as a human, was welcome in, but as a part of this cult of the Army, I was not. Was this my destiny for the next 7 years of my contract? Barging in on nations and communities where I did have no functional place? What is teaching English in one day? Visiting an orphanage and meeting the kids in just one day in another? What are these encounters but for the white supremacist military? For the photos that show we do humanitarian missions, even if they do not impact the communities? For the photos of us training with other nation's militaries to show our peacefulness and cooperation, while at the same time we fight with China for each part of Africa as if it is nothing but land and resources to be taken. We see the world as subject to exploitation backed by the US war machine.

While it was supposed to be a peaceful mission for us to be in Mozambique as Cadets, we still set the tone for the United States to reign supreme. We still robbed life as if it was worth nothing while homing in on nothing but the target, the end goal of colonization and resource control of another rich landscape. This narrative and attitude will perpetuate until leaders at all levels assume risk and stand up for what is right and take accountability for the wrongdoings of the American Empire or refuse the orders that hold America in its most corrupt form, standing. May we all step back from the ranks that hold us hostage to a vicious force and a brainwashed perspective of the world. May we all genuinely serve and protect our communities in other, more sustainable, practical ways.

May we let love win so that we don't anymore, spill red.

Emily Sanner is a 28-year-old Army veteran from Hadley, Pennsylvania, who is currently active in her Pittsburgh community, organizing against the war machine.

Pieces

They do not fly very high,
no need, there is nothing to bring them down.
They float, sighing,
so benign, not a menace until
they drop their burden,
not carelessly because it became too heavy,
but with deadly deliberation upon
tents, hospitals, schools, homes, homes, homes.
Black smoke leaps violently
sundering a serene sky,
rubble falls, hammering the ground
in a punishing cascade
followed by a much softer rain
of pieces of people.

—Woody Powell
Korea vet

Falling

E.C. Streeter

The monsoons were nothing like the frightening moments, of course, but they frequently seemed to rival them in their almost mind-numbing effects. I arrived in Vietnam in June 1970, and for about four months beginning in October, the rains seemed almost endless. Humping through the jungle under our ponchos, we would find ourselves wondering if our sweat was making us wetter than if we'd not even bothered with raingear. At night we would have to dry our socks over the heat from the sterno pellets we normally used for warming our C-rations. Sometimes, it would be so rainy and foggy that the resupply helicopters couldn't find us, and we'd run out of food. What was most disheartening, though, was simply not knowing when it would end. Everyone was keenly aware of exactly how many days we had left in-country, but none of us knew how many more days of near-constant rainfall we would have to endure.

Finally, in February, the rains began to taper off. One morning, we were patrolling the jungle floor somewhere west of Hue, our usual territory, when helicopters picked up our platoon and took us to a high ridge. It was an especially sunny day, and up there, I almost felt as though we'd been whisked off to some magical monsoon-free land where we might be able to forget all our recent soggy memories instantly. However, these kinds of pleasant thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the almost deafening roar of a jet. By the time I turned to look in the direction of the sound, it was gone, but a second one soon arrived, and I could see through the trees that it was flying by us at practically eye level. I saw about a half dozen canisters drop from it, each falling haphazardly. They were silver-colored, and they almost glinted in the sunlight. The plane and its jewel-like payload had come into view and then vanished so quickly that it all seemed nearly dreamlike; then the guy walking in front of me turned and said, "Napalm, the bombs are intended to tumble like that so that the chemicals can mix before they hit the ground."

I later learned that we were in the area of the A Shau Valley, and "dreamlike" would hardly have been an appropriate description. We were near the narrowest part of the country, about thirty miles southwest of the city of Hue, and the proximity to the border with Laos made it a desirable entry point for troops and equipment coming from North Vietnam by way of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That afternoon, needless to say, was far from the first time the region had been bombed.

Yet another patrol on which we accomplished nothing. Yet another day that could have served as an apt metaphor for that ill-begotten war.

The control of the valley had been a concern ever since North Vietnamese troops routed a Special Forces outpost there in 1966. The first effort to retake it came in the spring of 1968 as part of an attempt to regain some of the footing lost in the wake of the Tet Offensive debacle in February and March of that year. Beginning on April 19th, the initiative lasted for a month, and with the help of multiple air strikes, the soldiers of the First Cavalry Division managed to reoccupy the spot abandoned by the Green Berets two years earlier. Success was immediately proclaimed, but the US and South Vietnamese forces soon withdrew, and the North Vietnamese lost no time in reoccupying the region.

The 9th Marine Regiment was sent to reclaim the ground in February of the next year. The initiative was called Dewey Canyon; it lasted two months and included a clandestine incursion for a week and a half into Laos to conduct ambushes of the Route 922 section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. For political reasons, the eight American soldiers who were killed there were listed as having died in Quảng Trị Province, the region just to the North.

Two months later, it was the 101st Airborne Division's turn. Based at Camp Eagle North of Hue, the A Shau Valley was almost literally in their backyard. Operation Apache Snow, as it was called, began on May 10th, 1969. Just three days in, there was a grueling attack by soldiers of the 187th Infantry Regiment on a hill that involved eleven assaults over ten days. There were so many casualties that the location—its geographic name was Hill 937, the number referring to its elevation—acquired the nickname of Hamburger Hill. "Have you ever been inside a hamburger machine? We just got cut to pieces by extremely accurate machine gun fire" was how one of the soldiers later put it. As was often the case, the site had no strategic significance and was abandoned a few weeks after the end of the initiative.

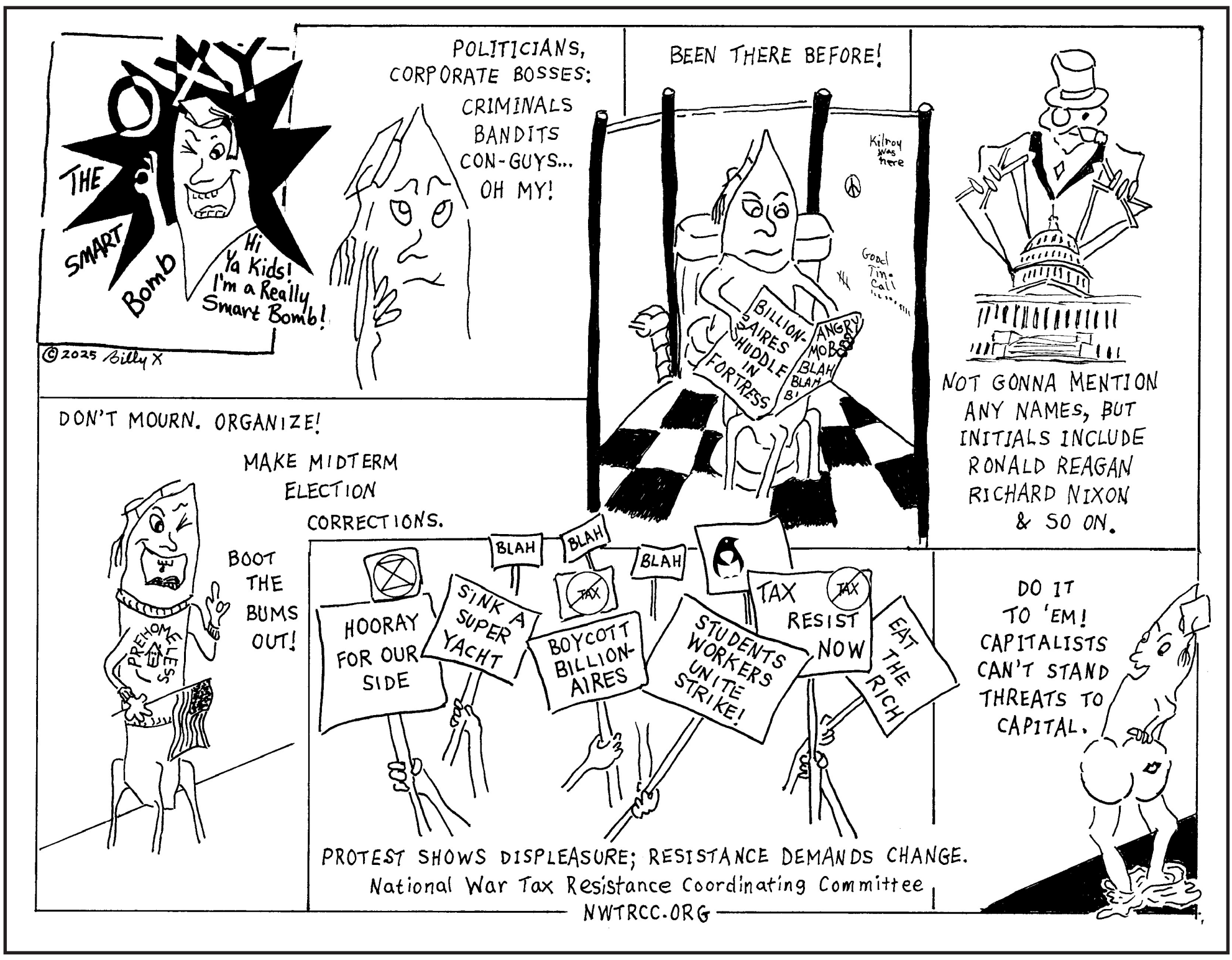
A bit more success was achieved later in the month by troops from the 506th Infantry Regiment, which I was eventually attached to. Despite heavy casualties as well, they managed to capture a good amount of weapons, ammunition, and rice before the operation was stopped on June 7th.

The napalm attack that I witnessed was part of an initiative called Operation Dewey Canyon II that began on January 22nd, 1971. The goal was the same as before: to keep North Vietnamese soldiers from entering South Vietnam. Toward that end, South Vietnamese troops were secretly sent into Laos to capture Tchepone, a town just west of the border that was viewed as a key part of the North Vietnamese supply line. The stealth strategy, however, failed, and the South Vietnamese were forced to retreat. The American arm of the operation was an attempt to get the North Vietnamese to divert some of their soldiers from defending Tchepone. The initiative was terminated on March 18th.

Operation Dewey Canyon II is now probably best known as the ironic inspiration for the choice of the name Operation Dewey Canyon III for the landmark anti-war demonstration conducted by VVAW just a few weeks later in Washington. The four-day protest culminated on April 23rd, with over a thousand vets dramatically throwing the combat medals they'd been awarded onto the steps of the Capitol. Two weeks later, my time in Vietnam came to an end, and I was discharged a couple of days after getting back to "the world." I joined VVAW the following fall when I began college.

The sun was blazing that afternoon when helicopters picked us up and took us back down to the jungle floor, presumably a good distance from the A Shau Valley. Yet another patrol on which we accomplished nothing. Yet another day that could have served as an apt metaphor for that ill-begotten war.

E.C. Streeter is a retired high school English teacher. He served as an army medic from June, 1969 to May, 1971.



Comments or suggestions? Contact Billy at billyx.net@gmail.com or visit him online at www.billyx.net.

THE VETERAN
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The Bloodbath That Wasn't

W. D. Ehrhart (reviewer)

Those Who Stayed: A Vietnam Diary by Claudia Krich
(University of Virginia Press, 2025)

From the very beginning of Richard Nixon's presidency until the end of the Vietnam War and after, Americans and Vietnamese were told over and over again that if the Saigon regime lost the war, there would be a communist "bloodbath" in the South.

In a 1972 speech, for instance, Nixon declared that if the war were lost, an "inevitable bloodbath . . . would follow for hundreds of thousands who have dared to oppose Communist aggression."

Speaking at Brandeis University after the war ended, historian Howard Zinn stated that "rumors of a 'bloodbath' by the advancing armies spread panic in Saigon and brought thousands of Vietnamese crowding hysterically around the American Embassy, seeking evacuation. Secretary of Defense [James] Schlesinger spoke of 200,000 killed if the communists won. The American armed forces newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, in one of the last issues to arrive in Saigon, carried a headline: 'At Least a Million Vietnamese Will Be Slaughtered.'"

The "proof" of these assertions was the so-called Hue Massacre during Tet 1968, where occupying Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers supposedly rounded up 3,000 to 5,000 innocent civilians and executed them. This incident has been absorbed wholesale into American mythology, though no tangible evidence—no documents, no photographs—nothing has been provided to substantiate the accusation.

Indeed, the story of this "communist massacre" never even emerged until 18 months later when the American massacre at My Lai—amply documented and photographed—became public.

Moreover, I was there in Hue City during Tet, and I can tell you that a lot of civilians were killed, not deliberately but because they happened to get caught in the middle of the biggest battle of the Vietnam War. And something had to be done with all those bodies when the battle ended.

Years later, in 1990, I was back in Hue, where a former Viet Cong fighter told me that several hundred Vietnamese who had actively collaborated with the Saigon government and the Americans were indeed executed. Still, they were hardly innocent; it was a few hundred, not thousands. And the man I spoke with observed, "Look what the French did to those who collaborated with the Nazis."

All of this is a very long but useful—I think—preface to a new book called *Those Who Stayed: A Vietnam Diary* by Claudia Krich. Krich arrived in Vietnam in the spring of 1973 with her husband, Keith Brinton, to take over as director of the Quaker Rehabilitation Center run by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) at Quang Ngai Province Hospital.

The center manufactured prosthetic limbs for civilians injured in the war, provided those prostheses free of charge, trained amputees in the use of their new limbs, and even offered some vocational training.

Krich and Brinton were never in danger from local National Liberation Front (NLF) guerrillas, who knew they did not take sides in the war and were doing good things for the Vietnamese. But in the spring of 1975, as the Saigon armies fell apart and retreated from the northern provinces in complete disarray, Krich and Brinton decided to leave for fear that either vengeful Saigon soldiers (Army of the Republic of Vietnam or ARVN) would shoot them for spite, or North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers would not realize they were neutral and shoot them by mistake.

So Krich and Brinton ended up in Saigon in the last two months of the war, where they encountered Vietnamese—especially well-to-do Vietnamese—who were convinced that women would be raped, those with painted fingernails would have their nails pulled out with pliers. Men and women would have their throats slit by marauding and merciless communist soldiers.

But there was little fighting in Saigon itself. And when the end finally came, NVA tanks rolled into the city to be greeted by smiling and cheering civilians—a lot of Vietnamese, by then, were tired of Nguyen Van Thieu and the Americans and only wanted the war to end. The tanks were followed by buses and trucks carrying bo doi (soldiers), who smiled and waved back at those who were smiling and waving at them.

Indeed, over the next days and weeks, a kind of euphoria descended upon the city, a festive atmosphere of relief, joy, and hopeful expectation. There was also more than a little chaos as the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) struggled to take over the reins of government that had fallen into their hands far faster and sooner than anyone had anticipated.

The greatest threats to public safety, it turned out, were embittered former ARVN and secret police and the infamous "Saigon Cowboys" (draft dodgers, thugs, and hoodlums who had inhabited the shadows for years). Just about every Westerner Krich knew in Saigon that spring had been robbed on the street; shoulder bags snatched, purses slit open, cameras stolen.

More than a few Vietnamese they encountered tried—often successfully, if temporarily—to pass themselves off as long-time NLF operatives or recently released political prisoners or both.

And it turns out that many of the bo doi were just young country kids who'd never been to any city, let alone cosmopolitan Saigon, and found themselves awestruck as they wandered around—seldom armed—exploring the wonders they were seeing. Sadly, many Saigonese took advantage of their naivete to sell them items such as cheap watches that were badly overpriced and as often as not stolen.

In the first few days, looting was also a serious problem. And this was done not only by armed ARVN but also by unarmed men, women, and boys. Almost anything portable was looted from stores, houses abandoned by those who'd fled the country, even embassies.

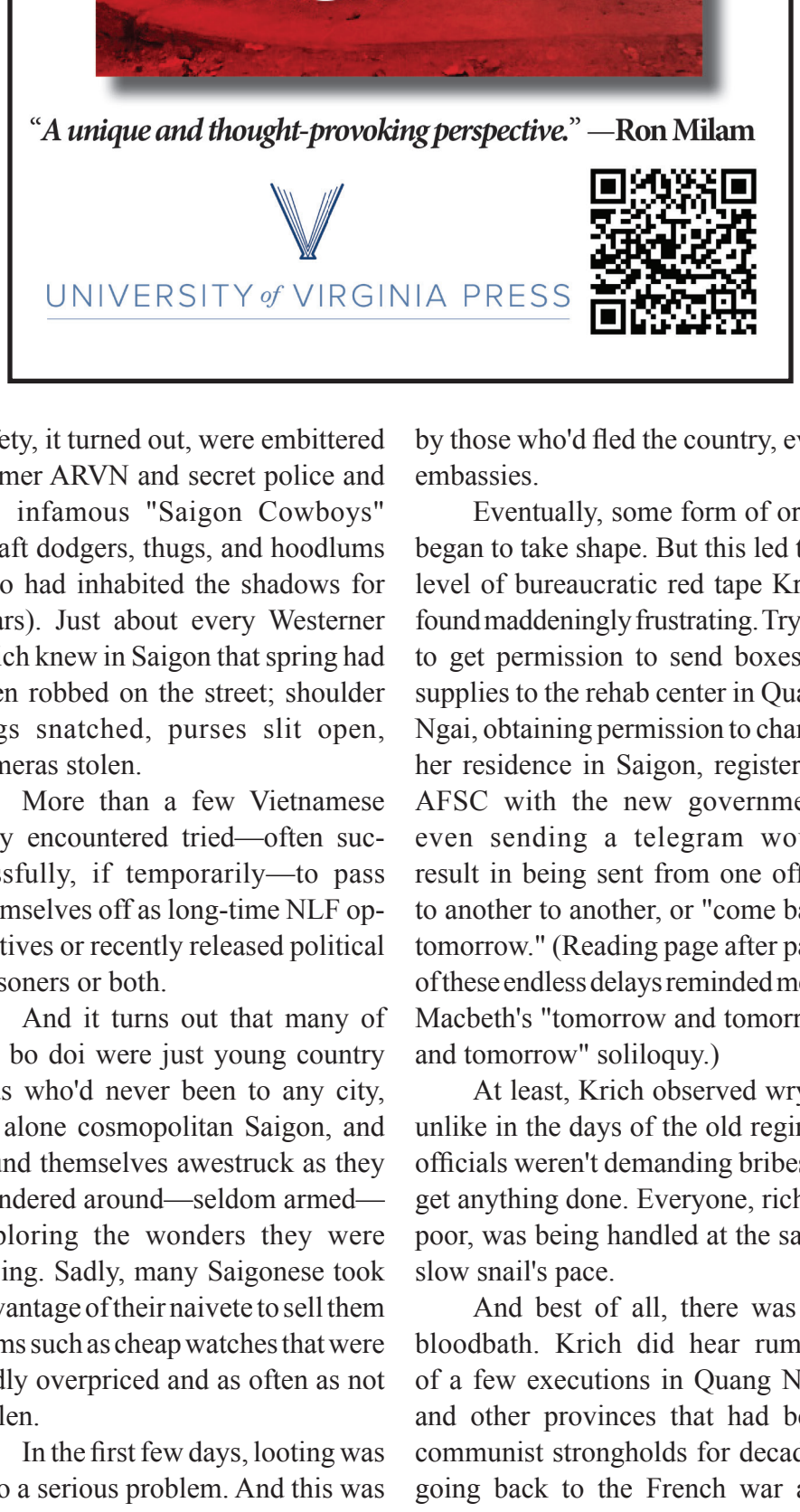
Eventually, some form of order began to take shape. But this led to a level of bureaucratic red tape Krich found maddeningly frustrating. Trying to get permission to send boxes of supplies to the rehab center in Quang Ngai, obtaining permission to change her residence in Saigon, registering AFSC with the new government, even sending a telegram would result in being sent from one office to another to another, or "come back tomorrow." (Reading page after page of these endless delays reminded me of Macbeth's "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy.)

At least, Krich observed wryly, unlike in the days of the old regime, officials weren't demanding bribes to get anything done. Everyone, rich or poor, was being handled at the same slow snail's pace.

And best of all, there was no bloodbath. Krich did hear rumors of a few executions in Quang Ngai and other provinces that had been communist strongholds for decades, going back to the French war and where Saigon officials had, therefore, acted with special brutality. And there were probably some local vendettas played out when the tables were turned on the oppressors.

But the mass killings of thousands, let alone hundreds of thousands, never happened. While the re-education camps that many former collaborators were sent to could not have been any fun, one need only remember what the Russians, the Chinese, and even the Spaniards did to those who fought on the wrong side in their civil wars to realize that Vietnamese postwar policies were relatively benign.

Krich's book, based on a diary she had kept at the time, is a useful and long-overdue corrective to the historical record. And it's a good read.



South Vietnamese soldiers arrive on May 1, 1975, at Van Hanh University in Saigon, where they discarded their uniforms and guns, then left as ordinary civilians. Photo from Claudia Krich.

W. D. Ehrhart is a long-time VVAW member, poet, and author.

The Relentless Call From Vietnam

Ngan Nguyen (reviewer)

When Eagles Vie with Valkyries: War and the Journey Home
by Paul Hellweg
(self-published, 2024)

On a humid summer afternoon in Saigon ten years ago, I tried to hold back my tears while listening to the elderly man with no legs telling me about his life. Nguyen Van Thuong was a double agent in the Vietnam War. After being captured in 1969, the Americans offered him a beautiful and smart woman, a check with $100,000, and a one-way airplane ticket to choose any country that was in alliance with America. He declined. The CIA tortured him by smashing his feet and then amputating his legs. This process was repeated six times until two stumps were left. Thuong remained silent. I asked Thuong which choice was tougher for him. I looked at his cloudy eyes and let this hero gently lead me to his past.

One day, I read *When Eagles Vie with Valkyries: War and the Journey Home,* a collection of poems about the Vietnam War and its consequences written by Paul Hellweg, an American soldier in Vietnam during the time the CIA tortured Thuong. A strange feeling rushed into my mind as I have no idea how my country has haunted Paul. As I belong to a generation that was born after 1975, what I learned at school or read about the wars with China, France, and America was that our Vietnamese soldiers are heroes. The world-famous novel *The Sorrow of War*, written by Bao Ninh, tells the story of a Northern soldier who, after leaving university, embarked on a wounding journey based on his experiences in the Vietnam War. His book was never mentioned at school, and it was banned for a time in Vietnam. Paul's poetry led me on a journey that enabled me to perceive my own country's war through different eyes.

As fresh as morning dew, twenty-three-year-old Paul arrived in Xuan Loc, Dong Nai, around one hundred kilometers from Saigon in the summer of 1968. He would have never imagined what was waiting for him, that Lunar New Year, which marked a milestone for the coming failure of American troops and Southern Vietnam. Only four months later, his troops got caught in a land mine blast. Witnessing so many comrades' deaths and injuries, and even himself getting severely injured, he almost felt the cold hand of the Grim Reaper. Whenever the weather changes, his left shoulder reminds him of the painful incidents in 1968 and other unforgettable memories in Vietnam. One year in Vietnam, but it lasts forever on his body and mind.

Reading these poems enables me to follow Paul's journey, an example of an American generation that stepped onto the land of a tropical country with different motivations for young and innocent men, even those who had no choice in their lives.

> We all had our reasons
> for joining the cause,
> patriotism
> anti-communism
> idealism
> romanticism,
> and all too frequently,
> no other option.
> *—War: The Road More Traveled*

Being enthusiastic for life, those young men joined a war that did not know what was waiting for them. War has many faces, but none of them are glory or honor.

> You realize you're still on the ground,
> on your knees, struggling, unable to rise,
> and you have a flash of comprehension,
> you are too far away from Bobby
> for all the blood to be his.
> *—All the Blood*

The truth proved too harshly, violently, and quickly. The question of whether they killed Viet Cong or civilians who were young or old, women, children, or men tortured a young man. Those dead are human, even though they were just a number that the soldiers reported back to the heartless people sitting in the office.

> Your platoon sergeant walks the field,
> reports counting thirty-two enemy dead.
> you want to ask their ages. You do not.
> First day in the field and
> emotional numbing has begun.
> *—The FNG*

Until one day, what is in the soldiers' mind is just the instinct of a living creature of how to survive.

> Emotionally drained,
> you want to remember and honor
> but mostly you're just grateful
> and pray your boots
> moldy and mildewed
> remain where they are,
> on your feet.
> *—Boot in the Mud*

Vietnam became the furnace for these American men who were too young to perceive the line between the truth and lies but one thing they realized was how they lost their youth and innocence.

> Day of innocence, days of youth,
> days when your biggest losses
> were from the football team
> wearing your colors, purple and gold.
>
> Days before the egret's snowy plumage
> became flecked in red, and
> Mike Company lost three captains
> in as many weeks.
> *—Finding a Fourth*

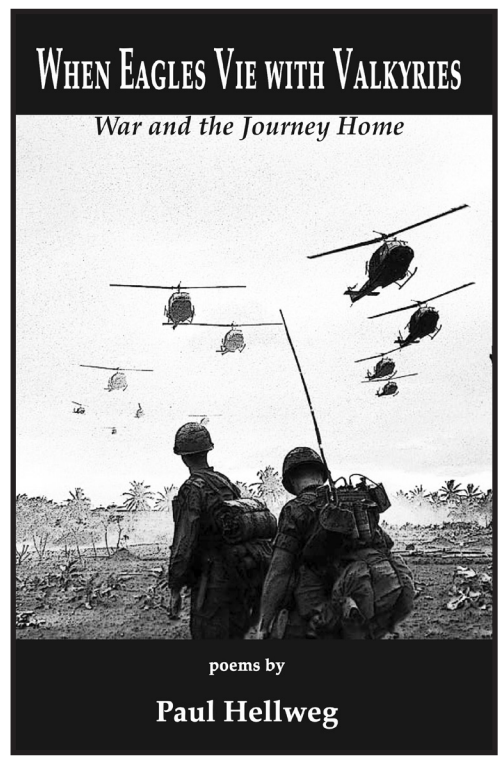
When Eagles Vie with Valkyries, Paul's title for his collection of poems, urged me to watch the clip "Ride of Valkyries" in *Apocalypse Now*. The mixed emotions of anger, horror, and fear tortured me. It reminds me of the strange and scary night when my neighbor came back from visiting his original village in Quang Ngai province, came to our house, and showed us the picture book about the My Lai massacre. That was the first time I had seen the horrific pictures about the war and what American troops did to Vietnamese people. Did I lose my childhood after seeing those pictures that very evening? How about Paul or other young American men who stepped on Vietnamese land and found that they lost their innocence?

> To endure war is
> only meaningful if
> you come out alive
> not too badly damaged,
> and with something
> at the other end.
> *—Prey for War*

How many soldiers or civilians left the war without an invisible scar? In the second part of this book, Paul describes how the war haunted his life. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) engulfed the veterans from the death of their comrades and Vietnamese people who were Viet Cong or civilians. There were ways for people to forget the past and float through the present with alcohol dependence or whatever they could. As a hero who received two Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart for his service in the Vietnam War, Paul feels:

> Strange,
> seeing as how today
> you have difficulty
> summoning the courage
> to face the emptiness
> of doing a load of laundry
> or making a piece of toast.
> *—Hero*

These above words brought the image of Steve Butler, a US Marine in *Heaven and Earth*, that helped me understand more about the Vietnam War. The ghost of the past haunted



Steve, leading him to have a painful ending, which, thank goodness, never happened to Paul. It took Paul nearly forty years after serving in Vietnam to return to this country to face the shadow of the past.

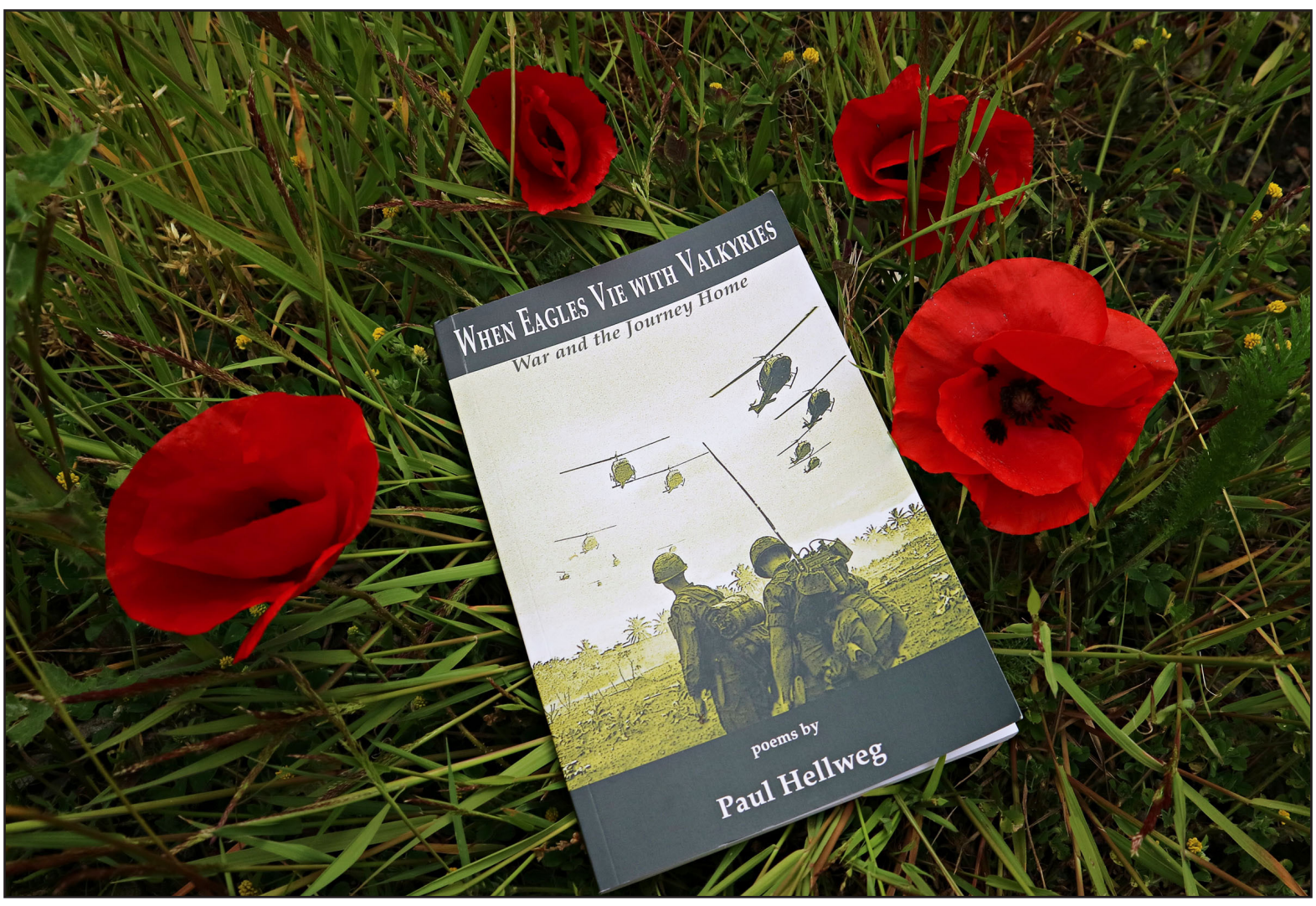
> The dead from that was so long ago
> continue to haunt.
> You wish it were possible to speak with them,
> but you know not what language.
> *—Ghosts*

On the journey to search for peace in the country that stole his youth, Love found its way and a happy ending for a lost American veteran who was a mixed heritage child who brought hope to his life.

> Home is the place most difficult to find
> buried under debris thrown up by memory
> blood of both types on hands,
> and now a tiny one holds tight.
> *—Michele*

Paul was a hero in his journey of facing the wounded past and searching for a peaceful way to live for the present and future. By narrating his life, which is related to the Vietnam War, through poetry, Paul chose a beautiful way to let the past have a meaningful message to other generations. *When Eagles Vie with Valkyries: War, and the Journey Home* is an anti-war voice from an American veteran who knows "The Sorrow of War" from his gut.

Ngan Nguyen is a Vietnamese-born author who lives in Scotland and has successfully published ten books in the Vietnamese language.



Looking for Duong Thu Huong

JOHN W. CONROY

Novel Without A Name was the first book written by a veteran from North Vietnam to be translated into English. The author, Duong Thu Huong, was not a soldier. She was an entertainer who performed for NVA troops and the army of drivers, porters, and repairers who operated along the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the American War in Vietnam.

Her protagonist,Sgt. Quan, spent nearly ten years fighting the Americans and the ARVN in South Vietnam. Beginning as a patriotic citizen from the North, he becomes more and more disillusioned and anti-war as the years go by. He wants to go home...just like most of the enemy soldiers he is fighting.

I traveled to northern Vietnam in the late Nineties to meet with Duong Thu Huong. Aside from a literary interest in her book and its author, I wanted to discuss purchasing the screen rights to Novel Without a Name. The following article contains excerpts from the original, unpublished work written years ago.

A harsh wind was blowing from the Chinese mountains in the North. It swept through Hanoi, driving an icy-like rain going straight to the bone. I should have gotten used to it, coming from just below the border south of Montreal, but I had just left Saigon that morning...sweltering Saigon...same as in the old days. And it still is Saigon, not Ho Chi Minh City...not yet. No GIs in jungle fatigues, though some old ones are here, mostly invisible as they pass through. Some of them stay…those who can't leave.

Anh was with me. As a kid, He left on the boats years ago but had returned to Saigon for a fresh start. We were looking for the writer Duong Thu Huong, Vietnam's best-known political dissident...and its most popular author. Her novels *Paradise of the Blind* and *Novel Without a Name* have been translated into French and English and are known worldwide. She has had trouble with the authorities for sending them abroad for publication.

Duong Thu Huong had gone south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail as a young woman of twenty. She'd spent seven years under the guns and bombs of the US military, living in the mountains northwest of Da Nang and Hue. Her job was entertaining, singing, and dancing for the troops who fought and the army of young volunteers who maintained the trail south. The communist youth brigade that she led began with a troupe of forty. She was among only three survivors who emerged from the jungle in that spring of 1975 when the North was finally victorious.

During the Chinese-Vietnam border conflict in 1978, she was the first woman correspondent at the Front to record the hostilities. When her books were published abroad, first in French, she began having trouble with the government. An anti-war position was less appreciated by her government than ours. I asked Anh how we could find her.

"All I need's a phone, and I'll come through," he said.

I'd spent enough time in this country to know that he would. Nothing goes undetected in Vietnam. An old Saigon hand in the US Foreign Service once remarked that the Vietnamese grapevine is the fastest form of communication known to humanity. In my experience, it still was.

Quan, the protagonist of Huong's book *Novel Without a Name* grows tired and disillusioned after ten years in the field. At one point, while thinking over those years, he says to himself. "I was a coward. I have known both glory and humiliation and lived through all of these years with their sordid games. The eighteen-year-old boy who had thrown himself into army life was still just a boy, wandering lost somewhere just beyond the horizon. I had been defeated from the beginning, for I had never really committed myself to this war."

Anh was off the phone. "She's down in her home village of Thai Binh for the weekend. If you want, we can rent a car and go looking." After much conversation, we found a driver willing to make the trip.

Thai Binh is 100 kilometers southeast of Hanoi in the Red River Delta. It's rice country known as the "breadbasket" of the North. The area has historically been a hotbed of revolution and nationalism, both of which were harnessed by the Indochinese Communist Party in the '30s and '40s. More recently, dissent toward the present government has surfaced again in this area, and unbeknownst to us, foreigners were banned.

The most famous war photographer of all time, Robert Capa, was killed by a mine on the highway to Thai Binh after the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. It seemed likely that no American had been in the area since the last pilot from the Sixth Fleet was shot down here in the 1970s.

Doung Thu Huong and John Conroy.

Along this road, we were traveling the same path Duong Thu Huong, the protagonist from *Novel Without a Name*, the North Vietnamese Army Sergeant Quan, had traveled as he returned home for a visit during the waning days of the war. This surrealistic journey back to the scene of his youth and first love makes up a key narrative of the book.

The village of Thai Binh looked to be a pleasing and prosperous little town despite the grey skies and the dampness of the wind. We stopped to speak with some local people, and in no time, Anh came up with an address. At the time, I had no way of knowing that the building flying the national flag across the street was the police station and local lockup.

We wandered the usual maze leading to local housing once off the main streets in Vietnam and practically bumped into our author having tea with friends and relatives on her back porch. From their expressions, I surmised they hadn't seen a "long nose" here in years. Anh and I were invited for tea, and since Huong, like most of the intellectual crowd in the North of Vietnam, spoke French, not English, Anh translated from Vietnamese for me. She seemed to know that I was the guy from America who wanted to have a movie made from her book. I'd been in touch by fax a couple of times and through friends on the phone...and the conversation began.

"As a youth my interest was music, however the schools did not offer a great deal so you might say that I was mostly self-taught. When the war heated up and all the other young people were participating in one way or another, I too had to do my part. I volunteered for the front lines and stayed there for seven years. I was in a theatrical group that entertained the fighters and the transport people as well as the native supporters in the bombed-out areas. We were morale boosters, and we tried to sing so loud that no one could hear the bombs. Only three of my troupe out of our original forty survived."

I asked her about the character Quan in *Novel Without a Name*... his origins or if he was based on a particular person. "He was the friend of my uncle's son. He was the man I loved, but he did not survive the war."

Huong insisted that she finish her work in the fields of her ancestor's graves before nightfall, so farewells were made, and she walked us back to the car. As we approached our vehicle, we found it surrounded by police.

We approached the police. They requested passports and, in due time, began their questioning. "Who are you?" and "Why are you here? Are you journalists? This is only a tourist visa. Why are you here?" and on and on. Anh tried to explain that we were only interested in their neighbor as an author, not as a political person. Then, the policeman motioned us toward the back seat. We obliged and then drove the short distance to the station. Since not a soul in the world knew where we were, the thought of being locked up wasn't that appealing.

Anh said they wanted to call the Interior Police, a combination of the FBI and the CIA, which we objected to. I told him that we'd done nothing wrong and that they had to let us go. The policeman began waving my passport at Anh, who grabbed it from his hand. The cop went ballistic, and I yelled at Anh to watch himself.

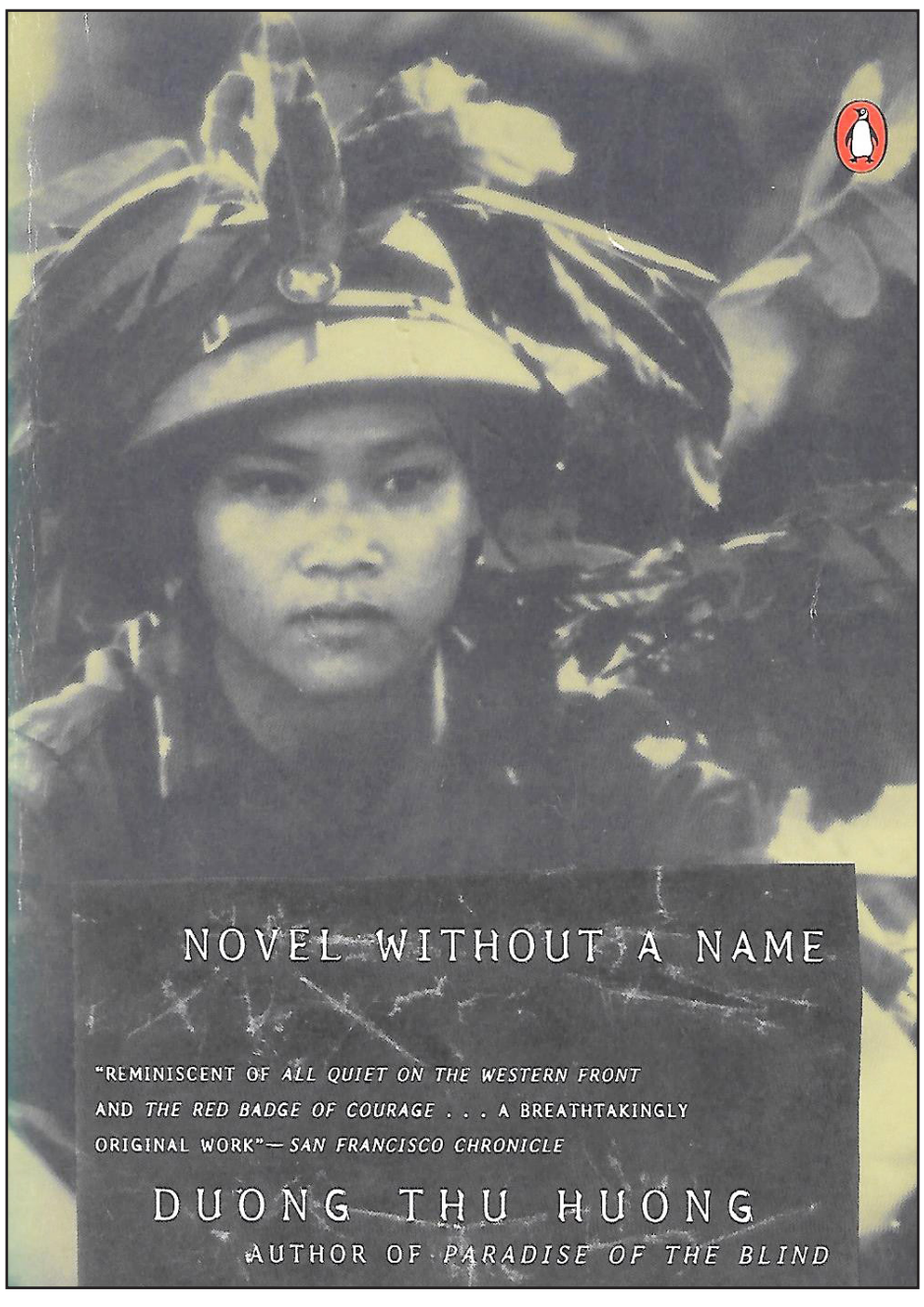
"They don't scare me. I am boat people. I left this county in a leaking tub at fourteen and nearly died a dozen times before reaching safety in Malaysia. We haven't done anything wrong." The cop started screaming at us once more. I stood up and again tried to explain things. The officer finally listened.

Anh took over, and after a moment, the officer smiled. They resumed a quiet conversation in their language and decided that if I would sign a statement concerning our presence in Thai Binh, we could both leave.

Eventually, they produced a prepared statement, which Anh read through and I signed. Smiles returned, and another of the officers passed cigarettes around, as is customary in Vietnam. It was a peace pipe in this instance. After a few puffs, handshakes, and smiles, we bid farewell to our interrogators and hit the road for Hanoi.

We decided to head directly to the No Bai Airport and catch the last flight back to Saigon. The driver agreed. I think he wanted to be rid of us for good. We managed to catch that last plane to Ho Chi Minh City.

I acquired an option for her book's film rights and adapted a screenplay from *Novel Without a Name*. However, I could not move this project forward in the film business. The response invariably was...you can't get a movie made in this town without a white man lead...and that's where that project was left.


NOVEL WITHOUT A NAME
"REMINISCENT OF ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT AND THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE . . . A BREATHTAKINGLY ORIGINAL WORK"— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
DUONG THU HUONG
AUTHOR OF PARADISE OF THE BLIND

JOHN W. CONROY WAS EMBEDDED WITH THE US ARMY SIX TIMES IN IRAQ AND FIVE TIMES IN AFGHANISTAN. HE WAS A SOLDIER IN VIETNAM IN 1966 AND 1967. SINCE RETURNING TO VIETNAM IN 1989, HE HAS WRITTEN NUMEROUS ARTICLES CONCERNING THE COUNTRY, SOME OF WHICH FOCUSED ON VETERANS OF THE CONFLICT. HIS PUBLISHED NOVEL IS THE GIRL FROM TAM HIEP. THE EMBEDDED ONES AND THE DISILLUSIONED ARE IN PROGRESS.

Ravens on a Wire

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

Ravens on a Wire
by Andrew Bacevich
(Falling Marbles Press, 2024)

Andrew Bacevich is a Vietnam veteran, a graduate of and former instructor at West Point. He retired from the Army at the rank of Colonel. He received his PhD in American Diplomatic History from Princeton, taught at West Point, Johns Hopkins, and then Boston University, where he is Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History. Bacevich is the author of more than a dozen books, including *Breach of Trust: How Americans failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (2013); *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (2008); *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (2005); and *Paths of Dissent: Soldiers Speak Out Against America's Forever Wars* (2022). His essays and op-ed articles have appeared in *The Nation, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, The New Republic, The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Boston Globe*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

He is a regular contributor to Tom Dispatches. Bacevich is the president and co-founder of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a think tank that advocates for a more peaceful and non-interventionist US foreign policy. In May of 2007, his son, 1st Lt. Andrew Bacevich, age 27, was killed in Iraq.

I have met Bacevich and heard him speak at the Vietnam Peace Commemoration reunion conference held in Washington, D.C., in 2020 to contradict the pro-war stance of the federal government and Pentagon's 50th-anniversary "Commemoration of the Vietnam War," a heavily-funded event lasting from May 28, 2012, to November 11, 2025, that has carefully and systematically ignored any reference to the Vietnam Era peace movement. An exceptionally clear thinker and spokesperson, Bacevich's ability to make a presentation to a large audience is every bit as effective as his writing, and off-stage, he is wonderfully articulate and a very nice guy.

Now, significantly, he has followed up his dozen non-fiction books with, of all things, a novel. The story covers ten days in and around a US army outpost located at Rotz in Germany, close to the Czechoslovakia border. Famous since the Civil War, the 16th Armored Cavalry Regiment is known as the Ravens. At the beginning of the story, a helicopter reports that a jeep has flipped near the Czech border, and a GI is lying nearby, unmoving and wounded ... or worse. It is February and intensely cold with heavy snow. Many roads are clogged, so it takes a while for a rescue party to arrive at the scene. Two soldiers are dead, and it is difficult to rig the jeep and haul it up out of the snowy ravine.

From the beginning, Bacevich's story is populated with a strange group of American soldiers. As a former soldier and Colonel, he has created a cast of key characters featuring officers and high-ranking Sergeants, the crowd with which he is most familiar, and a smattering of low-ranking enlisted personnel tossed into the mix occasionally. His officer staff, or cadre, contains a colorful group of individuals. Barton Caldwell, known as "Quickdraw 6" to his peers and "Beancounter 6" or BC6 to his men, is a forty-one-year-old colonel in charge of the 16th Armored Cavalry Regiment. He expects to be promoted to brigadier general soon. General Aloysius "Big Al" Patterson is known as the "Lion of the Ravens." He oversees the Ravens regiment from his headquarters in the city of Nurnberg. Appearances are all-important.

Patterson's daughter is married to Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Massey, the commanding officer of the 3rd Squadron, a career military veteran with a reputation as a leader who gets things done. Patterson and Massey have no use for each other. Massey's wife, Connie, is on base and usually drunk. Further down the ladder of ranks comes Major Tobias Hicks, or "Tubby." A Black Vietnam veteran, Tubby is seen by his peers as someone who has failed to live up to his potential and will probably never see another promotion. He is a nonconformist, reads poetry, is soft-spoken, cerebral, and a talented basketball player, and he has just learned that his wife Isabelle, back in New York, has suffered a miscarriage. They had hoped the baby might reinvigorate their marriage, but Tubby has no intention of ever leaving the Army. Captain Sydney Marks is the first and only Black in the regiment to be named a Troop Commander. Placed in this position by Hugh Massey ahead of several better-qualified candidates, Mark seems lackadaisical and bewildered, misunderstood by everyone but his pregnant German girlfriend. First Sergeant Dennis Chisholm is a swaggering veteran of many years in the Army. He is a loud and boastful professional soldier loyal to the Army far more than to the enlisted men he oversees. The regimental chaplain is Reverend Francis Xavier ("F.X.") Scanlan. Tubby and F.X. are close friends. A freelance civilian reporter, Zaid Muhammad, was kicked out of the Army for political activism but stayed in Europe. He changed his name from Terrence Atkins and began to specialize in articles that were embarrassing to the American military in Germany. Larry Kaplan is a veteran *New York Times* foreign correspondent assigned to investigate the suicide of a Black US Army officer near the German border with Czechoslovakia.

When the crashed jeep and two dead soldiers are discovered, this cast of characters goes into action. Since the Vietnam War, the Army has been desperately intent on restoring the American public's respect, and no one likes bad news. Hugh Massey's immediate reaction is to relieve Sid Marks from his command. Marks drives through the swirling snowstorm to the wreck site, then proceeds to a remote forest trail where he parks his jeep, takes out his pistol, and commits suicide. The skeletal plot of this story involves all of these characters' interest in preventing any negative association from damaging the image of the regiment or the US Army overall. Again, since Vietnam, the Army has labored to reclaim its image, and the reader can only assume that the book's focus upon this aspect must reflect Bacevich's long years of service surrounded by fellow officers obsessed with restoring the Army's reputation. Through his characters, he paints a transparent picture of the American military, completely missing the point of the public's rejection of its military after the debacle that was the Vietnam War.

Yes, it is a pretty good book, tense and entertaining as the mysteries slowly unravel. However, much as I admire Andrew Bacevich's writing, a few observations must be offered. First of all, having spent his adult life in close company with the American Army, the author probably thinks we will all be familiar with the makeup of that institution. Maybe the Army was different when I was in Vietnam. The 16th ACR is a regiment, but I am unfamiliar with an Army squadron or the L Troop. *Ravens on a Wire* would have been much more understandable and enjoyable if the author had included two flow charts, the structure of the Army components, and a chart of the various military characters as a cascade of responsibilities and who reports to whom. Finally, I assume the author has been assigned to Germany and is somewhat familiar with the language. I have some German ancestry, but I don't know a Zigeunerschnitzel from a Kartoffelsuppe, a Suddeutsche Zeitung from a Standartenführer, or a Hauptbahnhof from a Spetzi. Most readers won't.

The author of a novel has two primary goals. He seeks to create a work of art that will entertain the reader while making a point. Bacevich's writing is clear and descriptive, and the characters have a variety of human attributes. There is a strong sense of mystery about Captain Marks' suicide, and that leads to the discovery of a conspiracy in which Americans smuggle luxury goods like bibles, cigarettes, and booze across the border to the "enemy" Communists in Czechoslovakia. I don't want to be a spoiler. I enjoyed the book and am fascinated by the broad hints it reveals about the Army Officer Corps' obsession with re-examining the Vietnam tragedy and determining who was NOT at fault. "Whereas US military leaders were alive to the crippling deficiencies in ARVN leadership, they were blind to their comparable shortcomings." It is a theme reported from various vantage points throughout the story. As a veteran, I recognized several threads, and I am grateful to Bacevich for writing about issues still damaging America's military today. The basic attitudes of America's military hierarchy have not changed, and they have not scored even a moderate victory since World War II. That can only be the fault of leadership. As long as they continue their unrealistic attitudes toward the soldiers on both sides of a conflict and the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire, America's reliance upon the military to solve international conflicts is doomed to failure. Andrew Bacevich has done an outstanding job portraying the attitudes that define that doom, and I encourage you to investigate this important book.

JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW AND THE AUTHOR OF ...AND A HARD RAIN FELL, A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM, AND VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER. HE IS HOPING TO FIND A PUBLISHER FOR HIS 1ST NOVEL.

January 20, 1973, Chicago.

Oh, How We All Sang Along: Continued Thoughts on LBJ

John Crandell

The termination of a very particular man's life and the resultant onset of US combat in Southeast Asia forged a precipitous inflection point for United States' society. Despite extraordinary achievements in arts and technology, a nation's confidence in its future coursed downward over decades, became enshrouded by an ever more crapulous presentiment, in one true fall from Olympus. What rises to mind as Don McClean sings "Bye, Bye Miss American Pie" for us? Instead of the death of an emerging rock and roll artist in 1959, we instead have been drawn towards reflecting upon the common prospect of our nation—no matter the path of our individual lives. By 1959, the dark, intrusive emergence of a particularly aggressive Texan in the red-baiting years after World War II would collide with the contrasting image and excitement surrounding a senator representing Massachusetts. For a time, the forwardness of the former was eclipsed by the congeniality of the latter, one person who has since remained a subject of inordinate human fascination. Seems that blood was destined to be shed, both at home and on the opposite side of Earth.

Down we have gone, plummeting from zenith to nethermost exigency, from JFK's speech in 1963 at American University to Trump's recent "I am your retribution." This series of articles form an attempt to exhume what one sees as Lyndon Johnson's truest motivation for waging death and destruction in Vietnam. Was our great quagmire wrought simply by political necessity or had he been forced, put in a position of "do it or else?"

James DiEugenio has written that by the chaotic summer 1963, John Kennedy intuitively saw that the South Vietnamese conflict was unwinnable given whatever assistance from America and that it took until the winter of 1968 for Johnson to realize the same. If Johnson had been leveraged into military involvement due to his long record in Texas and in Washington, it wouldn't have taken so long for anyone with the perspicacity he possessed to realize what was the real deal in the civil conflict so far distant. He had been a brilliant if corrupt political practitioner and all he had had to resort to was hiding behind anti-communism. He was as well quite adept in reading human personalities and his having assayed Ngo Dinh Diem as the Winston Churchill of Asia was all bullshit. But he had been the most brilliant congressional operative of his generation as well and no one in Washington could discern whatever side he was on on any issue until the final vote came down. One final vote on Johnson still remains and herewith, one tries to get it into the ballot box sixty years later.

It was during the siege of Khe Sanh that Lyndon called upon Truman's secretary of state to attend a rare briefing by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Roosevelt Room. Post briefing, Johnson ranted and raved for forty five minutes. Dean Acheson recognized the canned Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) performance for what it had been and walked out as POTUS fulminated. Afterwards, an assistant phoned Acheson from the Oval Office to express outrage. Truman's SecState told the assistant to "shove it up your ass" whereupon "Ol Hang Dog" grabbed the receiver to argue and instead got called on for the JCS charade. The top dog had been miffed as a result of the JCS not paying him obeisance when he'd been VPOTUS. Thus he was returning the favor. Clark Clifford's prediction of disaster was coming true. Johnson's intent to mislead Congress and the citizenry had forced McNamara's hand: either resign or cook the books. Mac readily chose the latter. In March of '64 he ditched the results of "War Game Sigma I-64." The Joint Chiefs had decided to study his option of a gradual increase in pressure against the North. Conducted April 6th thru 9th, it examined what most likely could result by including China and Russia in play. Findings indicated that the US would underestimate Hanoi's resolve, that North Vietnam was capable of responding to increased violence. Doubt was indicated as to the effectiveness of air power. The officer who played the role of the North Vietnamese leaders "banked on a lack of American resolve to see the effort to fruition." The ultimate result was that a path of graduated pressure would result in a protracted military commitment with little hope of success. Mac only wanted numbers, no ostensible negativity. In response to the Chief's request for increased action, he told them to submit quantitative data so that his staff could test their validity. Endemic corruption and lack of will within the South Vietnamese military would never be gamed. As H.R. McMaster has said, despite his expression of doubts, Johnson's every move, his every decision only indicates a move towards violence.

Circa June of 1961, one Henry Marshall had been murdered at his own ranch in Robertson County in connection to an investigation into federal subsidies by the USDA granted to the Texas empire of Billy Sol Estes, purveyor of mortgage fraud and ammonia tanks to Texas' cotton growers. Readers may want to investigate the notorious death of Marshall, deemed to have shot himself five times with his own rifle. A few months previous, Billy Sol's business manager had written his concern over Marshall's investigating pursuit of Estes in a letter to Clifton Carter, LBJ's chief benefactor in Texas. Three officials in the agriculture department would lose their jobs for having accepted bribes from Estes. Nearly two months before Marshall's death, Estes contacted the deputy director of the department and broached an "embarrassment of the Kennedy administration if the investigation were not halted." George Krutilek, Estes' own business accountant had been found dead on April 4th the previous year when Johnson was still senate majority leader. There was a severe bruise on his head. His passing was ruled as a suicide as well. Forty years later, Barr McClellan—Johnson's one time lawyer would write a book and allege that the late president and Edward Clark had conspired in the death of the accountant and covered up the true facts.

One can find quite a number of telephone conversations between Carter and Johnson as listed in the LBJ Library website. Various conversations having happened between Johnson and his closest friend Edward Clark—"The Secret Boss of Texas"are also indicated. It is a curious fact that all individual telephone records of LBJ as vice president ceased in early August of 1963 and did not resume until March of the following year. One wonders if his expressions of doubt to fellow politicians were truly of the moment or existential circa August 1964. Rather, you ponder as to the degree of his conceiving imagistic false ideas serving to obscure cynical posturing and concealment—the nation's ensnarement behind his grand spanking new interest in civil rights for America's minorities which seemingly began in a cubicle in the Minor Medical section of Parkland Hospital—twenty two November. Lady Bird was shaken by what she'd seen in the parking lot outside. Down the hall from Trauma Room One, the new POTUS stood calm, cool and collected against the wall directly behind her. As historians have told us, as soon as Ken O'Donnell entered to tell him that JFK was gone, he immediately seized the bull by the horns. Later, Bill Moyers would opine that Johnson's facial expression aboard Air Force One ought to evince a lack of perfidy. Yet he knew stories of "The Greatest Actor" and said actor's history of treachery.

In this grievous age we're all ensnared by suppositions, that we should possess more than everyone else and in getting no satisfaction, we're supposed to be someone other than ourself. JabbaSaurus successfully plucks the strings of bigotry and suppressed bitterness. We've witnessed an extended string of disasters, scandals and tragedy ever since we DEROSed.The level of corruption on high, particularly its blatancy serves to obscure the legacy of the Hill Country native. Where did lay the motivation and what have been the effects of his darkness? Adding to the ludicrous official report of the death of a president, we need to question the establishment view of the man who sent troops abroad so long ago. Further concerns over the 36th POTUS await one final installment in *The Veteran*.

In 1969 in the Central Highlands, John Crandell was confined inside chain link cages serving Fourth Infantry postal customers at Camp Enari as well as Camp Radcliffe.

To Janice, These Many Years Later

Dear Janice,
There was something I never told you, something I should've said, but never did.
I don't know if it would've changed anything. You know how crazy I was, and how I could never talk about the war.
But it was you, my love, you, Janice, who saved me, you, who kept me alive.
Not my M-16.
Not the crucifixion I wore around my neck.
Not Mike, nor Lonny, nor Lee.
But you.
Your photograph. The one at the beach. The one with you wearing white pants, and a salmon-colored sweater, and your face smiling back at me, so, so beautiful.
I would take you out from beneath my helmet liner, unfold the plastic bag that protected you from the sweat, mud, and blood, and imagine you were there, sitting next to me as I rest on the jungle trail; you, whispering to me to get up after a rocket attack wounded half our squad.
You were there when I called the napalm strike on a pagoda and children came running out in flames; your eyes told me I was still the same person even though I knew I wasn't and never could be again.
You were there when I was bleeding out waiting for the medevac to come; you, looking down on me from the dome of my helmet like a loving god; you, telling me to stay awake, to breathe, to not to give up, to not to die, to not to leave you.
I know it is too late to tell you this.
We have lived out our lives.
Alone. Separate. Long ago given up on the promises we made.
I loved you, and that love saved me, and I need you to know that.
I wish I still had your photograph.
I wish I knew where you were.
I wish I could say this, just once more, my love, to your eyes.

—rg cantalupo

Reflections on Resisting the Draft: Connecting to Vietnam Veterans

Ted Scharf

The most important part of this 50 plus year journey is to connect with Vietnam veterans in a respectful, supportive, and not offensive fashion. How can we best communicate across the fundamental differences we experienced more than 50 years ago?

1969–1972: When I first enrolled in college, I had been accepted for NROTC. The summer before college, I got to know some Quakers in the Philly area. When I showed up on campus, my hair had grown a bit longer. I spoke with someone at the NROTC office, saying, "I think this is not going to work." He took one look at me and agreed. Outside of classes, I spent that year learning to be a draft counselor. That is when my personal decision-making began.

I was daunted by the US Army's requirement that field medics are expected to treat wounded soldiers who can be most quickly restored to fighting effectiveness first rather than to prioritize the most seriously wounded. I realized that I could not comply with such a requirement. And I was too young to understand that no one would be looking over my shoulder in the middle of a firefight. (More generally, I expect that I would have been shitting my pants after the first gunshot and not be effective for anything. Fortunately, I have not had to answer that question.)

I was in an engineering program that first year, and by the middle of the second semester, I realized that I did not want to be an engineer. More importantly, I was unsure what to study, so I quit college temporarily. I lost my II-S deferment and was re-classified I-A. But I had some time to think. (This was an important and unanticipated gift from the II-S.) Within about six months, I resolved to resist the draft. (I had sufficient contacts in my Church to likely be able to qualify as a conscientious objector, i.e., I-O.) Instead, I resolved that our government should not take me, and it should not take anyone. Further, the US is my country, too, and I was not interested in relocating to Canada or Sweden. (I am sure every Vietnam veteran remembers the slogan: "My country, right or wrong." And: "America, love it or leave it.").

My father was a WWII veteran. He was a second lieutenant in the Army infantry, slated for the invasion of Japan. The atomic bombs were dropped while he was on pre-embarkation leave. He spent a year with the US occupation forces in Okinawa and, in the subsequent twenty years, in the US Army Reserve. Approximately one full year after I told my father I had decided to resist the draft, he told me something I will never forget. (He was much more religious than I.) He said he supposed that he understood how someone raised as I was could make such a decision. This is perhaps the greatest of the gifts that he ever gave me.

1973–present: I came along very late in the Vietnam War. I was convicted for resisting the draft in November 1972 and sentenced during Kissinger's Christmas bombing of North Vietnam. My sentence was four years' probation with alternate service. According to *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam*, I am one of about 5,000 men in our generation convicted for resisting the draft and one of about 10,000 known resisters. Thus, collectively, draft resisters did very little to stop the war. It was the millions of young men (aka., "draft dodgers") who were awarded legal deferments and exemptions who denied the manpower to keep expanding the US commitment to prosecute that war. My judge let me off after three years and three months of alternate service. However, I was still performing my service when Nixon resigned and Saigon fell. I did not apply for the Ford and Carter amnesties/pardons. At that time, I understood we had to say we were "sorry" and would never do it again.

I say to any Vietnam veteran I meet that I had it very easy. I did not have anyone shooting at me, and I did not have to shoot at anyone. I did not lose any friends. Further, I had some great jobs and met some wonderful people. (Yes, I had to report to a probation officer and all that stuff, but it was all just minor bureaucracy.) Even better, I transferred to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Antioch's established co-op program allowed me to work full-time and study part-time. When it got to be too much, I would take a break from my studies and just do the work. One consequence of this strategy was that my judge tried to require me to remain at a co-op posting in Minnesota beyond the scheduled six months.

The Vietnam Wall, 2008.

Years later, after deciding to continue on a post-graduate degree, I completed a Ph.D. in Social Ecology (emphasis: environmental psychology) at UC Irvine. This qualified me for a job at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) within Health and Human Services. The irony of ironies is that I must have passed the FBI background check! The second irony is that many of my early co-workers were men of our generation who received a draft deferment or exemption or were commissioned in the US Public Health Service.

I have always been concerned about meeting veterans without them knowing about my refusal. NIOSH (as everywhere in the government) hired many veterans, so whenever I learned that a co-worker was a Vietnam vet, I made it a point to let him know about my resistance/felony/refusal. I did not want this co-worker to learn about my draft status from someone else, as though I were hiding it. Also, this is not about pride or anything like it. I was fortunate to have a long exposure to events (i.e., very late in the war), a supportive Church community (for example, my bishop attended my trial), and then the time to think before resisting the draft.

The first Vietnam veteran I met was a fellow UC Irvine grad student and former Marine at an artillery base in I Corps. He taught me a great deal about the conditions that he experienced. He and I visited the Wall in DC together for the first time in the fall of 1990. He took me to the engraving of his deceased friend. Since then, I have never been to DC without visiting the Wall. I regard it as a sacred space.

I am not seeking closure; I do not want to offend anyone. There have been some Vietnam veterans who reacted quite negatively when they learned of my status. I do not wish to remind them of the friends that they lost. I do not want to raise disturbing memories of my presence. The Vietnam War was a period in our lives that no one of us can ever forget. But fully understanding this period, personally and for our entire generation, is an elusive goal.

Ted Scharf was convicted on two counts of resisting the draft in November 1972 and sentenced to 4 years' alternate service on probation in December 1972. He recently retired from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health after 30 years as a research psychologist.

Letter to the Editor

Did They Really "GIVE" Their Lives?

I did not serve in Vietnam. I was placed in federal custody for the crime of my birthday on May 25, 1971, until May 15, 1973, with my probation ending on May 24, 1977. I took the oath of "incarceration" under duress, to which I no longer had a legal right. Since my February 15th birthday in 1969, I have endured each February 15's unwelcome greetings.

I write about this year's Memorial Day. We pause a bit before we enjoy our three-day weekend to honor those who gave their lives for the defense of America, even if it wasn't America being defended.

Yet, as to drafted KIA Vietnam Veterans, this is a sham. The question America is afraid to address is, did those drafted KIA Vietnam Veterans "give" their lives for their country, or were their lives taken by their country?

—Richard H. Skiba, Jr.
Palatine, IL

Teaching Map-Reading To Draftees

Navigation by dark was the lesson,
but it was never that alone.

For here the map and the terrain
were one, the course more than
the checkpoints they found or lost,
or the three-day pass they might win
by being the first team in.

The nineteen-hour flight to a war
no training could teach them
to understand would always
come too soon. No, the red lens
they held in their hands was like

so many colors they would soon
learn to read by catching more than
light or hue or lines. A few weeks
and the slow parachutes
of red, blue, and green flares
would rain down over everything
they were—their hands, their faces,
their fatigues, even their expressions
would change under the firefight's
kaleidoscopic light—

and the mortar's red flash, the AK's,
the rocket grenade's,
would tinge their eyes
with a redness through which
they would ever read The World—

the map no longer paper
in their hands, but a memory,
a place, a reddened leaf on a hill
somewhere, a hole in the wet earth
an inch too shallow to save a man—

—rg cantalupo

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

created by Robert Spicher

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is over 55 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW! DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

Membership Application

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email address _____
Branch _____
Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
Unit _____
Military Occupation _____
Rank _____
Overseas Duty _____
Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.

From 2.5 pages of text in a Chomsky paperback*

Stunning clarity: that we had to bomb Vietnam
in defending Vietnamese from somebody else
"Since nobody else was there"
the truth of matters get buried
"Under edifice after edifice
of lies upon lies"
When too many people
begin to understand
Such thoughts need rearrangement
into a strange form of sanity
"That whatever we do is right"
be it in Central America, the Middle East
Or Chile
if the average American thinks approximately
100 thousand Viet civilians were annihilated by US
despite millions having died thus
No wonder that inside Oval Office
JabbaSaurus once sat, and sits again
Will Berkely or MIT be bombed
in saving Americans from somebody else?

** Media Control - Representation as Reality, By Noam Chomsky, 1997*

—John Crandell

The Price of Macabre is Written on the Wall

When I came back from Viet Nam,

I was homeless

in

the mind.

More Viet Nam veterans

have committed suicide

than were killed in Viet Nam.

If Americans don't understand

this truth,

their stupidity will repeat

itself.

And... that's exactly what happened.

—Mike Hastie

RECOLLECTIONS

A Bad Morning on the Da Nang Bridge

RICHARD FLEMING

It was the fall of '68, and Force Recon was running missions out of Camp Reasoner, on the outskirts of Da Nang. We usually had at least a few days off after we got back from the bush, and my friend Bo talked me into going with him to the city.

We hopped a truck and headed into Da Nang. As usual, the main road through the city was filled with military vehicles, motorcycles, and people on foot. Our progress slowed to a crawl as everyone was squeezed into the two-lane bridge spanning the Da Nang River, but then we stopped completely. There seemed to be some sort of commotion ahead of us, and after a few minutes, Bo and I decided to leave the truck and walk down to see what was holding things up.

As we got closer, we could see the problem. The wheel had fallen off a large hand cart that a farmer was using to bring his load of melons into the city. The cart was now stuck in the middle of the road, and the farmer's melons were rolling around on the road. The old man was trying his best to gather them together before they were smashed.

A Korean convoy approached from the opposite direction. Half a dozen soldiers jumped out of the lead truck and approached the cart. At first, I thought they would help the farmer pick up the fruit, but instead, they began throwing the melons up to their friends in the trucks. The old man pleaded with them to stop, but they just jeered at him. In a cruel game they threw the melons from one to another as he desperately ran between them. When they had taken the last one, they pushed his cart over the side of the bridge and into the river, laughing at the splash it made. Finally, the Koreans got back in their trucks. They left the old farmer sitting on the side of the road, his face in his hands, his body trembling. He had lost everything.

Someone in the truck behind me was blasting their horn over and over. I turned and saw a beefy Special Forces sergeant leaning out the window and yelling impatiently at the people in front of him, "Move it!... Move it!... Move it, I said!"

"What an idiot," I thought to myself. There was nowhere anyone could go, but the sergeant continued to pound on his horn.

A group of school kids were trying to cross the road ahead. The boys wore white shirts and black trousers. The girls were dressed in simple blue smocks. Their teacher tried to keep them in line as the traffic swirled around them.

Behind me, the truck horn blasted again and again. The truck's door opened, and a burly Special Forces sergeant got out of the cab and stepped onto the road. A mangy-looking dog followed him out the door, running to the front of the truck and lifting his leg on one of the wheels.

"Get over here," the sergeant ordered. The dog ran over to him, crouched by his feet, and looked up at him expectantly.

The sergeant looked around angrily, pointed to the group of students ahead of him, and shouted: "Sic-em"! The dog took off like a shot.

The teacher saw the animal running toward him and moved forward with his arms outstretched in a desperate attempt to protect his students. The dog immediately attacked him, burying his teeth in the teacher's leg and tearing his pants to shreds. The young man tried to push the animal away, only to be viciously bitten on his hands and arms.

The sergeant leaned lazily against the truck and watched, a satisfied look on his face. Finally, he put two fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly. The dog immediately ran back to crouch at his master's feet.

"Good boy", the sergeant told him, patting him on the head "Good boy."

The school girls were holding their hands to their faces and crying; the boys glared back at us with hate-filled eyes. The teacher (incredibly to me) bowed subserviently to the sergeant and tried to smile. Urging his students across the bridge, he limped off.

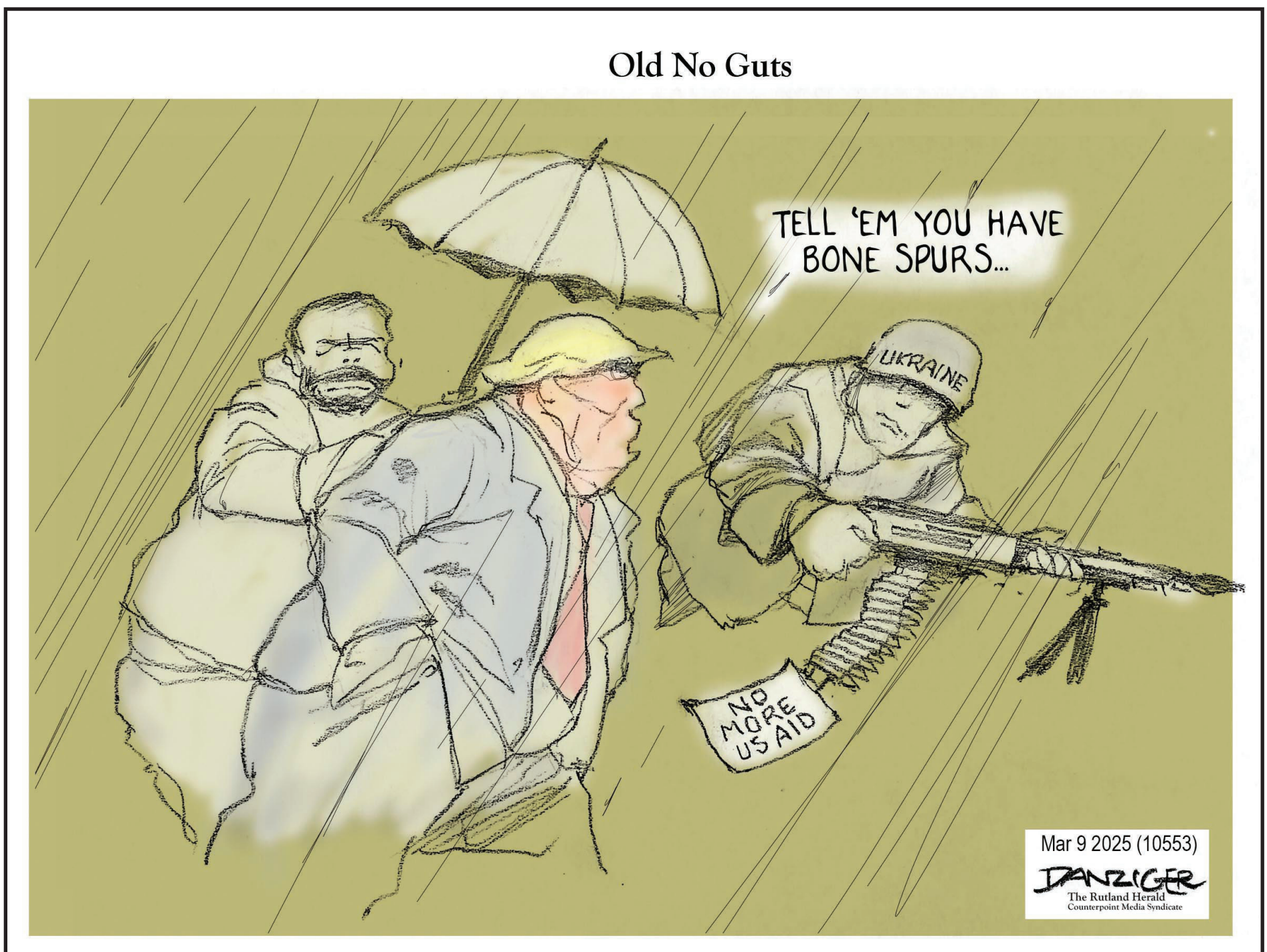
The sergeant turned to me, slapped his leg, and laughingly asked, "Did you see that yellow bastard run?"

He obviously expected my approval.

"You asshole," I responded hotly.

I was half-hoping that he'd try to sic his dog on me so that I could shoot it, but he just smirked. He walked back to the truck and hoisted his bulk into the cab. His dog jumped up and sat beside him, wagging his tail happily. "Good boy."

Ordering a dog to attack a group of children was a shocking act in itself, but the sick pleasure that the sergeant took in inflicting pain was an even greater sin. It is only a small step from the adrenaline-fueled exhilaration of combat and the feeling of joy one experiences after surviving a firefight to the sadistic pleasure that that sergeant obviously took in causing suffering. It was a step the Koreans took, but, Thank God, never by me.

It has been over half a century since that day on the Da Nang Bridge. I still remember the old farmer sitting by the side of the road, shaking his head from side to side in misery as the Koreans laughed at him. I remember the heroism of the young teacher who bravely stepped forward to protect his children, and I remember the naked hatred toward us on the faces of his students. I remember realizing that such actions would eventually cost us the war—and they did.

RICHARD FLEMING SERVED AS A RECON SCOUT WITH 1ST FORCE RECON CO. FROM 1968-1969. HE WROTE ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES IN "CHASING CHARLIE-A FORCE RECON MARINE IN VIETNAM."